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AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

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1 CORINTHIANS.

MDCCCXXIX.

THE BLESSINGS IMPARTED BY THE GOSPEL.

1 Cor. i. 4—9. *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

WE cannot but admire the address which is manifest in all the Epistles of St. Paul. He of course has frequent occasion to mention truths which are far from palatable to those to whom they are spoken: but he always introduces them in so kind a manner, and accompanies them with such expressions of the most unfeigned love, that it is almost impossible for any to be offended with him. He never shrinks from a faithful discharge of his duty: but he exerts himself always, to the utmost of his power, to heal the wounds which his fidelity inflicts. The Corinthian Church was in a far worse state than any other that he had occasion to address: indeed the manners of the Corinthians, previous to their conversion, were dissolute even to a proverb; and therefore it is the less to be wondered at, that, after their conversion, many of them should still need admonition on points which they had hitherto been accustomed to regard

as venial at least, if not altogether indifferent. On every thing necessary for their welfare, the Apostle here communicates his sentiments freely : but in the commencement of his epistle he makes no difference between the Corinthians and the purest of all the Churches. He knew that if many among them were corrupt, the great majority of them were sincere ; and therefore he comprehends them all in the first expressions of his regard, that he may afterwards have the more influence over those, whose errors he designed to rectify. And this by the way shews us, that, when we see in our Liturgy the same charitable expressions relative to the state of persons in our own Church, we ought not scrupulously to strain every word to the uttermost, but should allow the same latitude of expression in the one case as we do in the other. But not to dwell on this, we notice in this introductory acknowledgment of the Apostle,

I. The blessings which the Gospel *imparts*—

The Gospel is no other than “ a testimony ” of Jesus. This was “ the spirit of prophecy ” under the Old Testament^a; and it is the spirit of all the writings in the New Testament. What the testimony was, is declared with great precision by St. John : “ This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life ; and this life is in his Son ; he that hath the Son, hath life ; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life^b. ”

The believer has this testimony “ confirmed in him. ” There are two ways in which this testimony is confirmed : the one is externally, by signs and miracles ; the other is internally, by the operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul. The Corinthians had had it confirmed to them in both ways : for no Church exceeded them in miraculous gifts^c; and in the change wrought upon their own souls, they had an evidence of the truth and power of the Gospel : they had an evidence of it in “ the grace which had been given them by Jesus Christ. ”

^a Rev. xix. 11.

^b 1 John v. 11, 12.

^c 1 Cor. xii. 10.

Two things in particular they had received, which served to mark the saving efficacy of the Gospel; namely,

1. An enlightened mind—

[They had been “enriched by Christ with all utterance and all knowledge.” Distinct from miraculous gifts, there is in believers a knowledge of an experimental kind, and an ability also to declare that knowledge with ease and precision. It is a knowledge derived from the heart, rather than from the understanding; even such as Solomon refers to, when he says, “The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips^d.” St. John speaks of this when he says, “He that believeth in the Son of God hath the witness in himself^e.” There is a perfect correspondence between the divine record concerning Christ, and the feelings of the believer’s soul: he feels that he needs such a salvation as Christ offers, and that there is in Christ a sufficiency for all his wants: and in speaking of these things every believer throughout the universe is agreed. As in all human beings, notwithstanding some minute differences, there are the same general features belonging to the body; so in the minds of all believers there is, notwithstanding a diversity in smaller matters, a correspondence in their general views and sentiments; they all confess themselves to be sinners saved by grace through the Redeemer’s blood. Others, who are not true believers, may have the same creed; but they have not these truths written in their hearts; nor can they speak of them from their own experience: this is the portion of the true believer only; and it is a portion, in comparison of which all the knowledge in the universe and all the wealth of the Indies are but dross and dung^f.]

2. A waiting spirit—

[The Corinthians “came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The saints under the Mosaic dispensation waited for the first advent of our Lord: those under the Christian dispensation wait for his second advent, when he will come again from heaven in power and great glory, to gather together his elect, and to put them into full possession of their destined inheritance. The first Christians thought this period very near at hand: we who live almost 1800 years after them, believe that it is yet distant; because there are many prophecies not yet fulfilled, which must receive an accomplishment before the arrival of that time. But, as far as respects us individually, the time is near to every

^d Prov. xvi. 23.

^e 1 John v. 10.

^f Phil. iii. 8.

one of us, even at the door; for, on the instant of our departure from the body, we are borne into the presence of our Judge, and have our portion for ever fixed. Hence the believer waits for his dissolution, as the promised commencement of everlasting joys. Others may wait, and even long, for death, as a termination of their sorrows; but it is the believer alone who “looks for and hastes unto the coming of the day of Christ,” as the completion and consummation of all his joys. Others may affect heaven as “*a rest*” from trouble; but the believer alone pants for it as *a rest in God*. In the view of that day, “he is sober, and hopes to the end for the grace that shall be brought unto him at the revelation of Jesus Christ^g.”]

But from our text we are led to notice farther,

II. The blessings which the Gospel secures—

God in calling us to *the knowledge of his Son*, calls us also to *a fellowship with his Son*, in all the blessings both of grace and glory: and where he gives the former of these blessings, there he engages to impart the latter also. On this ground, the promise of a faithful God, the Apostle assured the Corinthians of,

1. Their continued preservation—

[“He shall confirm you unto the end,” says he. If believers were left to themselves, they would have no prospect of ever enduring to the end. So many and so great are the difficulties which they have to contend with, that they could have no hope at all. But God undertakes for them, to “keep them by his own power through faith unto salvation.” He engages both for himself and for them: for himself, that “he will not depart from them to do them good:” and for them, that “he will put his fear into their hearts, so that they shall not depart from him^h.” If they offend him by any violation or neglect of duty, “he will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: but his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from them, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail: for once he has sworn by his holiness, that he will not lie unto Davidⁱ.” So fully assured of this truth was Paul in relation to the Philippian Church, that he declared himself “confident of this very thing, that He who had begun a good work in them would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ^k:” and the same confidence we may feel in relation to every true believer, that “none shall ever separate him from the love of

^g 1 Pet. i. 13.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.

^h Jer. xxxii. 40.

^k Phil. i. 6.

Christ¹." God pledges his own word, that "he will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able^m," but that "he will perfect that which concerneth them." When therefore we "pray to God that our whole spirit, soul, and body may be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom," we are authorized to add, "Faithful is he who hath called us; who also will do itⁿ."]

2. Their ultimate acceptance—

["He will preserve us, that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Blameless" in some respect his people already are, inasmuch as the Lord Jesus Christ has washed them in his blood, and pronounced them "clean^o." But in the last day we shall be blameless in ourselves, as well as in him; being not only justified, as we now are, by his blood, but sanctified also by his Spirit, and transformed into the perfect image of our God. Then "will Christ present us to himself, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; yea, holy, and without blemish^p:" and in the meantime he will, by his almighty and all-sufficient grace, "strengthen, and establish, and settle us even to the end^q."

Thus does God assure to his people their continued preservation, and their ultimate acceptance with him: and he pledges his own faithfulness for the performance of his word.

But let no man imagine that these truths supersede the necessity of care and watchfulness on our part; for *God will never fulfil his promise to us but through the instrumentality of our exertions*. Hence he requires every exertion on our part, precisely as if he had left the final issue solely dependent on our own efforts; and suspends his promised mercies altogether on the performance of our duties. To obtain his final acceptance of us as blameless, we must *hold fast our faith*: "He will present us holy and unblameable, and unproveable in his sight, *if we continue in the faith* grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel^r." We must also *abound in love*; we must "increase and abound in love one towards another, *to the end that he may establish our hearts unblameable in holiness* before God even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints^s." We must also *use all diligence* in every duty; for it is by diligence that we are to "*make our calling and election sure*," and that we are to be "*found of him at last in peace, without spot and blameless^t*."

¹ Rom. viii. 38, 39. ^m 1 Cor. x. 13. ⁿ 1 Thess. v. 23, 24.

^o John xv. 3. ^p Eph. v. 27. ^q 1 Pet. v. 10.

^r Col. i. 22, 23. ^s 1 Thess. iii. 12, 13.

^t 2 Pet. i. 10. and iii. 14.

Here we see that the very things which God has promised to us, are to be obtained through the medium of our own *faith* and *love* and *diligence*. Without these, the end shall never be obtained (for God has connected the end with the means): but through the continued exercise of these, the end is secured beyond a possibility of failure. “God cannot deny himself^u:” and his word, confirmed as it is by covenant and by oath, can never fail^x. “Heaven and earth may pass away: but his word shall never pass away^y.”]

APPLICATION—

1. Be thankful if you are partakers of this grace—

[St. Paul “thanked God always on the behalf” of the Corinthians on this account: how much more therefore should those be thankful, who have received the benefit! To possess this experimental knowledge of the Gospel salvation, and to enjoy these blessed prospects of immortality and glory, is the highest felicity of man. Having these “things which accompany salvation,” we need not covet any other good, or regret any attendant evil: we have the richest blessings that God himself can bestow.]

2. Be careful to walk worthy of it—

[The mercies of God to us call for a suitable requital: and the requital which he desires is, a total surrender of ourselves to him^z. The thing which God designs, in the communication of his mercy to us, is, to “keep us blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus.” Let that then be our end in the improvement of them, even to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining among them as lights in a dark world^a.”]

3. Remember in whom all your strength is—

[Of yourselves you can do nothing. It is God, and God alone, that can “confirm you unto the end.” He who has been “the Author, must also be the Finisher,” of your salvation. It is “He that must work all your works in you:” “all your fresh springs must be in him.” Know then, that “he is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^b:” and he will do it, if you rely upon him; for St. Paul expressly says, “The Lord is faithful, who will stablish you, and keep you from evil^c.” To him therefore, even “to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen^d.”]

^u 2 Tim. ii. 13.

^x Heb. vi. 18.

^y Matt. xxiv. 35.

^z Rom. xii. 1.

^a Phil. ii. 15.

^b Jude, ver. 24.

^c 2 Thess. iii. 3.

^d Jude, ver. 25.

MDCCCCXXX.

THE TRUE LIGHT IN WHICH THE GOSPEL IS TO BE
REGARDED.

1 Cor. i. 23, 24. *We preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

THERE is a disposition in man to dictate to God, rather than to receive from him what he is pleased to give. Though this is not right, nor should ministers gratify it, yet they should consult men's prejudices, and "seek to please them for their good." The Jews and Greeks sought what from their education they had been accustomed to admire: but St. Paul, notwithstanding his readiness to yield in all things that were less important, was compelled to make the strain of his preaching directly opposite to their corrupt desires. "The Jews require, &c.; but we preach, &c."

I. The great subject of the Christian ministry—

The Apostle designates this by "preaching the Gospel," "preaching the cross," "preaching Christ and him crucified:" but in "preaching Christ crucified" he did not confine himself to an historical relation of the fact, or a pathetic description of it. To fulfil the true end of the Christian ministry, we must,

1. Declare the nature of Christ's death—

[This in appearance was only like that of the malefactors that suffered with him; but it was a true and proper sacrifice to God. In this light it was characterized by the whole Mosaic ritual^a: in this light it was foretold by the prophets^b: in this light it is plainly represented throughout the New Testament^c; and unless it be preached *in this view*, we do not, in the Apostle's sense, preach Christ crucified.]

2. Set forth the benefits resulting from it—

[There is not any one spiritual benefit which must not be

^a The sacrifices were types of the atonement.

^b Isai. liii. 5, 6, 10.

^c Matt. xxvi. 28. 1 Cor. v. 7. Heb. ix. 26. Eph. v. 2.

traced to this source; pardon, peace, holiness, glory, are its proper fruits. Without the atonement we could have received nothing; but by and through it we may receive every thing. This also must be distinctly inculcated, if we would approve ourselves faithful stewards of the mysteries of Christ.]

3. Persuade men to seek an interest in it—

[We find men filled with self-righteous conceits, and with great difficulty brought to renounce them: we must therefore argue with them, and urge upon them all the most powerful considerations: we must address ourselves to their passions as well as their understanding; and gain their affections on the side of truth. It was *thus* that Paul preached Christ; and it is thus only that Christ crucified can be preached aright.]

II. The manner in which it was, and is still, received—

As there were differences of opinion respecting our Lord himself, some accounting him a good man, and others a deceiver, so are there respecting his Gospel—

1. Some reject it with contemptuous abhorrence—

[Jews and Greeks were equally averse to it, though on different grounds. The *Jews* did not understand the true nature and scope of their law: hence they supposed that the Gospel was opposed to it, and that Christ was an enemy to Moses: and notwithstanding all the evidence they had of Christ's Messiahship, they rejected him from a pretended want of proof of his divine mission. The *Greeks* had been habituated to philosophical researches, and rejected the Gospel because there was nothing in it to flatter the pride of human reason: both these kinds of characters yet exist, and oppose the Gospel with equal acrimony; to some it is "a stumbling-block," as appearing to set aside good works; to others it is "foolishness," as militating against their preconceived notions of *rational* religion. And if it be not so dispensed by us as to call forth such treatment from such characters, we have reason to believe that we do not preach the Gospel as Paul preached it.]

2. Others receive it with the deepest reverence—

[There are some "called," not by the outward word only, but by the internal and effectual operations of the Spirit. These, whatever have been their disposition in times past, have their eyes open to behold the Gospel in a far different light. To them the doctrine of "Christ crucified" is "*the power of God*:" they see that it is that, by which God has converted myriads to himself: they feel also that it is that, to which alone they can ascribe their own conversion; and they know that nothing can ultimately withstand its power. To them it

is also "*the wisdom of God*:" they behold in it every perfection of the Deity united and glorified, whilst on any other plan of salvation some of his perfections must be exalted at the expense of others: they see it also to be suited to the state of every individual in the universe, whilst every other plan of salvation is suited to those only who have been moral, or who have a long time before them to amend their lives. Above all, they view it as bringing *the greatest good* that ever was vouchsafed, *out of the greatest evil* that ever was committed. No wonder that they "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of it."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who, like *the Greeks*, have a high opinion of their reasoning powers—

[You have just cause to be thankful for strength of intellect; but the province of reason is, to submit itself to God. God has not opened to your reason any one thing *perfectly*, either in creation or providence: be not surprised then if you cannot fathom all the mysteries of his revealed will: your wisdom is to become as little children; and if you will not condescend to be taught of Him, he will take you in your own craftiness^d.]

2. Those who, like *the Jews*, are concerned about the interests of morality—

[Did morality suffer in the life of Paul, or of the first Christians? Does it in the lives of many who now profess the Gospel? Are they not now condemned as much for the strictness of their lives as for the strangeness of their principles? Yea, does not morality suffer through the neglect of this preaching? Let not Christ then be a stumbling-block to you, but rather a sanctuary. If you reject Christ, however good your motive may *appear* to be, your misery will be sure^e.]

3. Those who embrace, and glory in, a crucified Saviour—

[Contemplate more and more the wisdom and power of God as displayed in this mystery, and endeavour more and more to adorn this doctrine in your lives. Let it never become a stumbling-block or foolishness through any misconduct of yours: let it be seen by your prudence, that it is true wisdom; and by your piety, that it is the parent of every good work.]

^d ver. 19, 25.

^e ver. 18. with 2 Cor. iv. 4.

MDCCCCXXXI.

THE OBJECTS OF GOD'S CALL.

1 Cor. i. 26—29. *Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence.*

IT is manifest to the most superficial observer, that the Gospel, wherever it comes, meets with a very different reception from different people; some accounting it foolishness, whilst others regard it as the wisdom of God and the power of God^a. That we must trace this to the dispositions of men, is certain; because the guilt of rejecting the Gospel must lie upon the sinner himself: yet, inasmuch as a love of the truth is not attainable by mere human efforts, we must acknowledge God as the true and only source of that difference which appears. If he did not interpose, all would equally despise the Gospel: it is his grace which makes the distinction, and causes some to overcome the corruptions of their nature, and to accept his proffered salvation.

To unravel this mystery, or at least to throw light upon it, we shall shew,

I. Who are the objects of his choice—

God's thoughts and ways are not only far above ours, but often directly contrary to ours.

He has not chosen "the wise, the noble, and the mighty"—

[He has not indeed excluded these; for he invites them all; and no more wills the death of them, than he does the death of any others: but he has not chosen them either *in preference* to the poor, or even *in comparison* of them. Some there have been in every age, who were possessed of much

^a ver. 23, 24.

human wisdom, and power, and wealth. God would not pass by them altogether, lest it should appear as if the possession of earthly wisdom and power were an insurmountable obstacle to the reception of the truth; or lest the embracing of his salvation should be thought incompatible with natural abilities, or intellectual attainments. Among the Corinthians there were Crispus and Sosthenes, chief rulers of the synagogue^b; and Gaius, a man of wealth and of an enlarged heart; and Erastus, the chamberlain of the city^c. Some few others were numbered with the disciples: there was Joseph of Arimathea, a rich and honourable counsellor^d; and Sergius Paulus, a Roman deputy, famed no less for his wisdom than his power^e. But if we were to collect the names of all, they would bear no proportion to the numbers of those who composed the Church of Christ. Though therefore there were *some*, there were "*not many*" of this description called.]

The objects of his choice are, the weak, the ignoble, the illiterate—

[As we do not say that these are chosen *exclusively*, so neither do we say that they are chosen *universally*; for, alas! there are myriads of poor who are as ignorant and depraved as it is possible for any of the rich to be. But the great majority of the Lord's people are of this description. They have not rank, or learning, or wealth, or great abilities, or any of those things which would recommend them to earthly preferments. This was the case with the first teachers of Christianity: they were, for the most part, poor illiterate fishermen and mechanics. And they who have been their followers have been almost entirely of the middle and lower classes of society. Who are the persons in every town and village who most welcome the preaching of the Gospel? Who are the people that are glad to avail themselves of all the spiritual instruction they can get? Who are they that will be thankful to you for speaking closely to their consciences, and for warning them of their danger? Who are they who will go miles every sabbath to a place where the Gospel is faithfully preached, notwithstanding, when they come thither, they can scarcely be accommodated with a seat whereon to rest? Who are they that love social meetings for reading the word of God and prayer; and that make it their meat and their drink to do the will of God? In short, Who are they that prove their effectual "calling," by turning "from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^f?" Are these the rich, the great, the learned? or are they

^b Acts xviii. 8, 17.

^c Rom. xvi. 23.

^d Matt. xxvii. 57. Mark xv. 43.

^e Acts xiii. 7.

^f Acts xxvi. 18.

the poor and unlearned? Let observation and experience decide the point. “You see your calling, brethren:” look at it, and judge^g: We are not afraid to make our appeal to yourselves; for God himself appeals to you; and thereby makes you judges in your own cause^h. We know that these facts give umbrage to many: but however the proud may find in these things an occasion of offence, our blessed Lord saw nothing in them but ground for praise and thanksgivingⁱ.]

Our subject leads us to notice,

II. The immediate effect of that choice—

We are told that Noah, in building the ark, “condemned the world^k.” A similar effect is produced by the peculiar mercy vouchsafed to the poor. The great and learned, though “they shame the counsel of the poor^l,” yet are ashamed^m and confounded when they see,

1. Their superior discernment—

[Many of the wise, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, are conversant with the Holy Scriptures, and extremely well instructed as to *the letter* of them. From hence they suppose that they must necessarily enter into *the spirit* of them, and be as superior to others in a comprehension of divine truth, as they are in wealth or talents. But when they come to converse with one who has been “called out of darkness into God’s marvellous lightⁿ,” they begin to feel their own ignorance, and to wonder at the depth and clearness of the person’s knowledge. They cannot conceive how an unlettered person should attain such just and comprehensive views, which they with all their application have not been able to acquire^o. They do not reflect on what God has told them, that “the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God;” and that the knowledge of them must be obtained by means of a spiritual discernment^p. They, through the pride of their hearts, presume to bring divine truths to the bar of their own reason; and thus are led to account them foolishness: but the humble disciple of Jesus willingly receives all that God speaks; and to him “every word is both plain and right^q.” But all this is a mystery to those who are “wise

^g It is just as in the days of old: Matt. xi. 5. John vii. 47, 48. Mark xii. 3.

^h Jam. ii. 5.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^k Heb. xi. 7.

^l Ps. xiv. 6.

^m κατασχίζη.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^o Prov. xxviii. 11.

^p 1 Cor. ii. 11.

^q Prov. viii. 9.

after the flesh,"—a mystery which mortifies their pride, and inflames their wrath^r.]

2. Their indifference to the world—

[The men of letters and of wealth, instead of rising above the world, are really its greatest slaves. To enjoy its pleasures, its riches, and its honours, is the summit of their ambition. They, on the contrary, who are "chosen of God and called^s," are enabled to renounce the world, and to regard it no more than they would a crucified object, with whom they have no further connexion^t. Now when these persons shew, by their heavenly conversation, that they consider themselves as mere pilgrims and sojourners here, and that "they are looking for a better country, that is, an heavenly^u," the poor slaves of this world cannot comprehend it. They wonder how any should be so indifferent to the things of time and sense, so bold to encounter the frowns and contempt of all around them, and so immoveable in their adherence to such exploded sentiments and conduct. They know that they themselves could not act in such a manner; and they are unable to account for it in others. But if they understood those words, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith^x," they would cease to wonder; yea, they would rather wonder that the operations of faith were not yet more uniform and extensive.]

3. Their delight in holy exercises—

[The wise, and mighty, and noble will often perform religious duties with a commendable regularity: but they comply with them rather as the institutions and customs of their country, than as exercises in which they find any pleasure, or from which they expect to derive any present benefit. It is far otherwise with the poor, weak, despised followers of Christ: they engage in these employments with delight: they look forward to the returning seasons of devotion with unfeigned joy: and, though they cannot always maintain a spiritual frame in them, yet there is no other employment so pleasing to them, or so productive of permanent satisfaction. Now this also appears strange and unaccountable to them that are yet in their unconverted state: they cannot conceive how it should be, that persons should multiply their seasons of worship, and put themselves to much expense and trouble in attending on them, without any apparent necessity. They can ascribe it to nothing but enthusiasm or hypocrisy. They are constrained however to confess, that, if religion so abstracts

^r John ix. 34.

^s Rev. xvii. 14.

^t Gal. vi. 14.

^u Heb. xi. 13--16.

^x 1 John v. 4.

the mind from earthly things, and so inclines us to set our affections on things above, their hopes and prospects are “brought to nought.”

Thus as the Gentiles, who *were scarcely regarded as having any existence*, were made use of by God to bring to nought the Jewish polity, in which *all that was valuable was supposed to be contained*^y; so the spirituality of real Christians is yet daily made use of by God to bring to nought the pride of wisdom, the power of greatness, and the fond conceits of pharisaic morality.]

But let us examine yet further—

III. Its ultimate design—

God, as it becomes him, consults in all things his own glory. In this dispensation more especially,

He has provided, “that no flesh should glory in his presence”—

[It would not become his Majesty to suffer any of his creatures to assume honour to themselves: it is meet and right that all should acknowledge him to be the one source of all their happiness. As he is the Author of their being, they cannot but be indebted to him for all their powers; and as he is the one Restorer of those powers, both by the blood of his Son and the agency of his Spirit, he must have the glory of all which may be wrought by them; none must stand in competition with him; nor must any presume to claim the smallest share of that honour which is due to him alone.]

The dispensation is admirably calculated to insure his end—

[If the wise and noble were called in preference to others, they would infallibly arrogate to themselves, in part at least, the honour of that distinction: they would either think that they had effected the change in themselves by their own power, or that God had had respect to them on account of super-eminent worth. But by the preference given to the poor, all occasion for such boasting is cut off. The rich cannot boast, because they have nothing to boast of. The poor cannot boast, as if God had respected their superior talents; for they feel and know assuredly that they had no such superiority, but directly the reverse. The few rich and wise that are among them cannot boast, because they find that they

^y This is the meaning of those expressions, “things which are not;” and “things which are.” Compare 2 Esdras vi. 56, 57. and the Apocryphal Esther, iv. 11. with Rom. iv. 17.

are few in number, and that the great majority of those who are as wise and great as themselves, have made use of their talents, only to harden themselves in infidelity, and to justify their rejection of the Gospel. Hence they are constrained to confess, that it is "God who has made them to differ^z," and that "by the grace of God they are what they are^a."

Many and important are the lessons which we may
LEARN from hence—

1. That God acts sovereignly in the disposal of his gifts—

[We should not hesitate, if any one presumed to direct us in the disposal of our own favours, to put this question to him; "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own^b?" Yet we are offended if God assert this liberty, and we think ourselves injured if any be chosen by him in preference to us. But how unreasonable and absurd is this! It is unreasonable, because we have no claim upon him for the smallest benefits. Who imagines that the fallen angels have any ground of complaint against him for withholding a Saviour from them, while he provided one for us? Yet they are a superior order of beings to us, and therefore might have been supposed more worthy of God's attention. What right then can any of us have to murmur, if he be pleased to impart salvation itself to some and not to others, when none possess the smallest title above their brethren? But it is absurd also: for God will not alter his dispensations because we choose to quarrel with them. That he does act in this sovereign manner we cannot doubt; for he dispenses his temporal favours according to his own will; and sends his Gospel to us, while it is withheld from far the greater part of the world: and he tells us no less than three times in the short compass of our text, that he has "*chosen*" some in preference to others. Let us not then dare to "reply against God^c:" but, while we confess his right to confer his benefits on whomsoever he will^d, let us humbly implore an interest in his favour, and lie as clay in his hands, that he may, for his own glory sake, fashion us as "vessels of honour meet for the Master's use^e."]

2. That there is not so much inequality in the Divine dispensations as we are apt to imagine—

[It is certainly God who causes some to be born to ease and affluence, whilst others are born to labour and penury. In a time of health there may not be any great difference

^z 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^a 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^b Matt. xx. 15.

^c Rom. ix. 20.

^d Rom. ix. 15—18.

^e Rom. ix. 21—23.

between them:—but what is there in a time of sickness! The one has all the comforts of medical aid, of numerous attendants, of delicacies suited to his appetite; whereas the other, in a cold and comfortless habitation, is without food, without fuel, without friends, his wife and children as well as himself almost perishing for want, destitute of every thing proper for his disorder, and subsisting only by the scanty pittance hardly obtained, and grudgingly bestowed by an unfeeling dispenser of the public charity. Compare these; and there appears as wide a difference between them as can well be imagined. But pause a moment: Is this the whole of God's dispensations towards them? Can we find nothing to counter-balance this inequality? Yes: look to the spiritual concerns of these two persons: perhaps, like Dives and Lazarus, the one has his portion in this life, and the other in the next: perhaps God has said to the one, "Enjoy all that the world can bestow;" to the other, "Enjoy my presence, and the light of my countenance:" to the one, "Be rich in learning, wealth, and honour;" to the other, "Be rich in faith and good works:" to the one, "Possess thou kingdoms for a time;" to the other, "Be thou an heir of my kingdom for evermore." Now, though this is not God's invariable mode of dealing with men, (for there are some who are poor in both worlds, and others rich,) yet it accords with the general tenour of his proceedings: it accords also with the text, and therefore is peculiarly proper for our present consideration. Take then the whole of his dispensations together, and it will be found that the spiritual advantages conferred upon the poor are more than an equivalent for any temporal disadvantages they may labour under. Let the rich then not pride themselves on their distinctions^f; for "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for them to enter into the kingdom of heaven^g: nor let the poor, on the other hand, be dejected on account of their present troubles; for God has chosen them (if they do not despise their birthright) to be partakers of his richest blessings, even life for evermore^h: but let all, whether rich or poor, seek to have "God himself for the portion of their cup, and for the lot of their inheritanceⁱ."

3. That they are the wisest people who covet the best gifts—

[It is generally accounted folly to "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness^k;" but the time will come when it will appear to have been the truest wisdom. Indeed "the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom^l;" insomuch

^f 1 Tim. vi. 17.

ⁱ Ps. xvi. 5.

^g Matt. xix. 23, 24.

^k Matt. vi. 33.

^h Jam. ii. 5.

^l Ps. cxi. 10.

that all who are not possessed of that, whatever else they may possess, are no better than fools in God's estimation. Let us not then be deceived by the glare and glitter of the world. Let us view things as God himself views them. Let us confess that it is better to be among "the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, the mere nonentities of this world," and attain eternal happiness at the last; than to be among "the wise, the mighty, and the noble," and to "have our good things in this life only^m."

We beg leave however to repeat, that the rich will not be excluded from God's kingdom, if they do not exclude themselves; nor, on the other hand, will the poor be admitted into it, if they do not "strive to enter in at the strait gateⁿ." Whatever we be in respect of our worldly conditions, we shall be admitted by the Bridegroom, if we be found among the *wise virgins*^o: but "the *foolish* shall not stand in his sight; for he hateth all the workers of iniquity^p."

^m Luke xvi. 25.ⁿ Luke xiii. 24.^o Matt. xxv. 8—10.^p Ps. v. 5.

MDCCCCXXXII.

CHRIST IS ALL IN ALL.

1 Cor. i. 30. *Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

HABITUATED as we have been from our early childhood to read the Holy Scriptures, and to hear them read in public, it is surprising that we do not gain a more clear and accurate knowledge of their contents. But experience shews, that, however strongly the inspired writers have declared the revealed will of God, it is but very partially and imperfectly known amongst us. The fact is, that we do not sufficiently consider the import of what we read. We pass over the most plain and significant expressions, without considering what is contained in them. When we read of a *Saviour*, we do not advert to the awful truth comprehended in that word, namely, that in ourselves we are utterly and eternally *lost*. In other words, we are very little affected with what is *expressed* in Scripture, because

we do not pause to inquire into what those expressions *imply*. That we suffer great loss by this inadvertence is evident from what our blessed Lord taught respecting the resurrection of our bodies to eternal life. The Sadducees could not find that doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures, or at all events not in the Pentateuch, which alone they regarded as of divine authority. Our Lord appealed to the name of Jehovah as proclaimed in the Pentateuch, namely, as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Now, says our Lord, consider what is *implied* in that name. Jehovah, as their God, is the God of their whole persons, their bodies as well as their souls; and, if their bodies are not to be raised again, that relation between God and them, so far as respects their bodies, is dissolved. But that relation never can be dissolved: therefore their bodies must be raised again, and be re-united to their souls, that so those departed saints may, in their whole and entire persons, for ever serve and enjoy their God^a.

Now I would wish to commend to you the passage before us in this peculiar view. St. Paul is shewing the Corinthians, that they neither have, nor ever can have, any thing to boast of; since “God has chosen the poor, and the weak, and the foolish, in preference to the rich, the mighty, and the wise;” and since whatsoever any of them may have, they have it solely in Christ, who of God is made to them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; and that consequently, whosoever glories, must glory, not in himself, but in the Lord alone.

In order that we may unfold these words to the greater advantage, we shall, in accordance with this hint, consider, first, What is implied in them, and then, What is expressed.

Now if we will duly consider these words, we shall see this evidently implied in them: first, that we *are destitute of all good in ourselves*, and, secondly, *that we are incapable of acquiring it by any power of our*

^a Matt. xxii. 32.

own. On a supposition that either of these positions were not true, what occasion would there be that all good should be treasured up for us in another, to be received from him? But they are true.—It is a fact, that *we are destitute of all good in ourselves*; for in ourselves we are *ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved.*

We are *ignorant.* What do we by nature know of ourselves? What know we of the corruption of the human heart? God himself has told us, that in the heart of man there are depths of iniquity altogether unfathomable, and workings that are utterly unsearchable: the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: Who can know it? And what know we of *God*? of his *holiness*, which cannot behold iniquity without the utmost abhorrence of it? of his *justice*, which cannot but visit it with righteous indignation? and of his *truth*, which cannot but execute every threatening which he has denounced against it? As to any mere notions which men may entertain in theory, I speak not of *them*; it is of *practical* knowledge that I speak: and I need only appeal to the lives of all around us, to prove that, so far from having any just knowledge of God, “there is not in the whole world an unconverted man, that understandeth, so as *duly and habitually* to seek after him^b.” On the contrary the conduct of all clearly shews, that “God is not in all their thoughts^c.” And what know we of *Christ* and of the incomprehensible extent of his love? Or what of his *Holy Spirit*, and all his enlightening, sanctifying, and consoling operations? What know we of *the evil and bitterness of sin*? or of *the beauty and blessedness of true holiness*? The testimony which our Lord himself has borne of us is undeniably true, that, however we may fancy ourselves “rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, we are wretched, and miserable, even poor, and blind, and naked^d.”

We are *guilty* also, to an extent which no words

^b Rom. iii. 11. Ps. liiii. 2, 3. ^c Ps. x. 4. ^d Rev. iii. 17.

can adequately describe. As to gross sins, I make no mention of *them*. Our whole life has been one continued scene of rebellion against God. Nor have we ceased to “trample under foot the blood of Christ, by which we have been redeemed; or to do despite to the Spirit of God^e,” who has striven with us, warning us against the evils which we have been habituated to commit, and stimulating us to those duties, which we have neglected to perform. Truly, on the most superficial view of our state we must be convinced, that “every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God^f.”

How *polluted* we are, in every member of our bodies and in every faculty of our souls, God alone knoweth or can conceive. Darkness is not more opposed to light, or Belial to Christ, than we, every one of us, are to the holy will of God, whether as proclaimed in his law, or as exhibited in his Gospel. How blind we are in our understanding, how perverse in our will, how sensual in our affections, who shall be able to declare? Even “the Apostles themselves once had their conversation in the lusts of their flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others^g:” And such have *we* been also. Our very “mind and conscience have been defiled,” so that there is not one amongst us who must not join in that humiliating acknowledgment, that “there is no health in us.”

In fact, we are altogether *enslaved*, or, as the Scripture expresses it, “taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will^h.” Nor is this true merely in relation to more flagrant transgressors only; “for the prince of the power of the air worketh in all the children of disobedienceⁱ,” and, however insensible we may be of his motions, does really instigate us to every evil we commit.

But I observed that there is yet further implied in my text, not only that we are destitute of all good in ourselves, but that *we are incapable of acquiring it*

^e Heb. x. 29.

^f Rom. iii. 19.

^g Eph. ii. 3.

^h 2 Tim. ii. 26.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 2.

by any power of our own. Were not this true, there would, as I have before observed, have been no need that all good should be treasured up in another for us.

Now *no one of these fore-mentioned evils can we remove.* Not our *ignorance*; for we are told that “God alone giveth wisdom^k.” The Spirit of God must “open the eyes of our understanding^l: nor can we without his gracious influence, “know the things which belong unto our peace.” We must have “a spiritual discernment in order to discern the things of the Spirit^m.” St. Paul, notwithstanding he had made a greater proficiency in Jewish literature than most of his own age, yet could not comprehend the true import of the Mosaic writings, or see their accomplishment in Jesus Christ, till “the scales, by which his organs of vision had been obstructed, were made to fall from his eyesⁿ:” nor could the immediate disciples of our Lord, who had heard all his instructions both in public and private for the space of three years, see the law of Moses fulfilled in him. The end of his death as a sacrifice for sin, the necessity of his resurrection to carry on and perfect his work, and the spiritual nature of his kingdom, were still hidden from them, till “He opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures^o.” So must “the Holy Spirit be given unto us also, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God^p.” Earthly knowledge we may acquire by the powers of intellect and by dint of application: but heavenly knowledge is the gift of God alone, who, whilst he “takes the wise in their own craftiness^q,” will reveal to babes “what is hid from the wise and prudent^r.” Nor can we by any means remove our *guilt*. Let us go and blot out of the book of God’s remembrance all the sins we have ever committed. Vain attempt! We cannot cancel so much as one sin; nor would rivers of tears suffice to wash away the slightest stain

^k Prov. ii. 6.

^l Eph. i. 18.

^m 1 Cor. ii. 14.

ⁿ Acts ix. 18.

^o Luke xxiv. 45.

^p 1 Cor. ii. 12.

^q 1 Cor. iii. 19.

^r Matt. xi. 25.

from our souls. Nor can we even abstain from contracting fresh guilt: for there is imperfection in our best deeds: our very tears need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of. Even St. Paul himself, eminent as he was, could do nothing on which he could rely for his justification before God; and therefore “he desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but the righteousness which was of God by faith in Christ^s.” A justifying righteousness must be perfect: but we can do nothing perfect: we need one to “bear the iniquity even of our holiest actions^t,” and therefore we must for ever despair of establishing a righteousness of our own, and must submit simply and entirely to the righteousness provided for us in the Gospel^u.

Nor can we cleanse ourselves from our *pollution*. “As well might an Ethiopian change his skin, or a leopard his spots, as we restore ourselves to the image of God in which we were at first created^x.” The renovation of the heart is on this very account called a new birth and a new creation^y; and it can be effected by none but God himself. Let any man put this matter to a trial: let him see whether he can mortify all the desires of the flesh, and efface from his mind the love of this world, and transform himself into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness:—he may as well attempt to create a world.

As for *deliverance* from all spiritual *bondage*, that also is utterly unattainable by human efforts. St. Paul even to his dying hour was constrained to cry, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me^z?” Hence in the truly scriptural Liturgy of our Church we are taught to acknowledge; that “we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins,” and to cry, “But do thou, O God, of the pitifulness of thy great mercy loose us.”

Now all this is clearly *implied* in the words of our

^s Phil. iii. 9.

^u Rom. x. 3.

^y John iii. 3. 2 Cor. v. 17.

^t Exod. xxviii. 38.

^x Jer. xiii. 23.

^z Rom. vii. 24.

text: and by a just view of this we are prepared to consider, secondly, what is *expressed*.

In perfect correspondence with the foregoing truths, we find in our text two things expressed, viz. that *God has treasured up for us in Christ all the good that we stand in need of*: and that *He will freely bestow it on every believing soul*.

Observe here how *God has treasured up for us in Christ all the good that we stand in need of*. God “has laid help for us on One that is mighty^a,” even on his own dear and only-begotten Son. He has treasured up for us in Christ a fulness suited to the necessities of fallen man^b, and has constituted him “Head over all things to the Church^c,” that “out of his fulness every member of his mystical body may receive^d” such a measure of grace as his peculiar necessities require. This is shadowed forth under the image of a vine, which supplies every one of its branches with the sap and nutriment which alone can enable it to bring forth fruit^e. “Separate from him,” every one of us would become dry and fit only for fuel. The Apostle Paul knew no other source of life and strength; and therefore he said, “The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself for me^f.” So in like manner must every soul of man come to Christ for grace to help him in the time of need. “Our fresh springs must be altogether in him^g.” “Our life is hid with Christ in God: yea, Christ is our very life:” and it is from that circumstance alone that we are warranted to hope, that “when he shall appear we also shall appear with him in glory^h.” “He is ascended up on high on purpose that he may fill all thingsⁱ:” and he does “fill all in all^k.” The very light which is reflected by the whole planetary system of moon and stars, proceeds from the sun; and the life of all the vegetable creation is sustained by its reviving

^a Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^b Col. i. 19.

^c Eph. i. 22.

^d John i. 16.

^e John xv. 5.

^f Gal. ii. 20.

^g Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

^h Col. iii. 3, 4.

ⁱ Eph. iv. 10.

^k Eph. i. 23.

rays. And so is "Christ the light and life of the whole world;" as it is written, "With thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light shall we see light¹."

This is yet more fully expressed in our text, which declares, that *Christ shall be made all unto us, even wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, to every soul that believes in him.*

Do we need *wisdom*? He shall be made wisdom to us. Wonderful shall be the views which he will impart to the believing soul: yes, the believer shall have, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, "the very mind that was in Christ himself," and be made to view every thing as God himself views it^m. What humiliating views will he have of himself as a guilty, corrupt creature, deserving of God's wrath and indignation! What exalted views will he have of all the Divine perfections, and particularly of them as united and harmonizing in the person and work of Christ! How will he be enabled to "comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth of Christ's unsearchable love, so as even to be filled by it with all the fulness of Godⁿ!" What a perception will he have of "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost^o," and of all his gracious influences, as "a spirit of adoption testifying to his soul, that God is his Father, and that he is God's beloved child^p!" In what hateful colours will he now behold the sins which he once loved; and how lovely in his estimation will be the paths of righteousness and true holiness! When once "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness in the material world shall shine into his heart to give him this knowledge, he will behold all the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^q."

Do we need *righteousness*? Christ shall be made righteousness to the believing soul. The very name by which we are privileged to call our blessed Lord, is, "Jehovah our righteousness^r." In Christ we shall

¹ Ps. xxxvi. 9.

^m Phil. ii. 5. 1 John ii. 20.

ⁿ Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^o Rom. v. 5.

^p Rom. viii. 15, 16.

^q 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^r Jer. xxiii. 6.

have a righteousness fully answering all the requirements of God's holy law, and satisfying the demands of his inflexible justice. Clothed in the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness, we shall be so pure that God will not behold in us a spot or blemish^s. Not the angels before the throne of God shall shine more bright than we: indeed they have only the righteousness of a creature, whilst the believing soul is clad in the righteousness of the Creator himself. Nor let any one imagine that this is the privilege of the Apostles only: no: the righteousness of Christ is "given *unto*" every believing soul, and "put *upon*" him as a garment, in which he shall stand accepted of God to all eternity^t.

Do we need *sanctification*? This also shall Christ be made unto us. Yes, he will make us new creatures. He will enable us to "put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to put on the new man, whereby we shall be assimilated to the Divine image^u." He has promised his Holy Spirit for this end, even to "sanctify us wholly^x." By applying to our souls his promises, he will enable us to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^y." Yea, by enabling us to "behold his glory, he will change us into his own image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord^z."

Finally, do we need *redemption*? He will be redemption to us, "delivering us from all the bondage of corruption, and bringing us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God." "When once the Son thus makes us free, we become free indeed^a." With what delight do we then walk in the ways of God, and with what enlargement of heart do we run in the paths of his commandments! Truly under the influence of his grace we enjoy almost a heaven upon earth. The exercises of prayer and praise are far different from what they were wont to be in our

^s Eph. v. 26, 27.^t Rom. iii. 22. Eph. i. 6.^u Eph. iv. 22—24.^x 1 Thess. v. 23.^y 2 Cor. vii. 1.^z 2 Cor. iii. 18.^a John viii. 36.

unregenerate state. Formerly we had no taste for them, no pleasure in them: now we are never so happy as when we get access to God in these duties: it is even “as marrow and fatness to our souls, when we can praise our God with joyful lips^b.”

True, “the flesh will yet lust against the spirit, as well as the spirit against the flesh:” but “sin shall no more have dominion over us^c;” we shall, in desire at least, be “holy as God himself is holy, and perfect as our Father which is in heaven is perfect^d.”

Before I come to my concluding remarks on this subject, I beg you to inquire with yourselves, whether you have ever had a practical experience of these things in your own souls? It is said in my text, “Of him are *ye* in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Now is this true of *you*? Have *you*, (I speak to every individual,) Have *you* ever been brought to such a sense of your own destitution of all good, and of your utter incapacity to supply, by any efforts of your own, your manifold necessities? Have you also been led to see what a fulness there is in Christ, exactly suited to your necessities? and have you actually received out of his fulness a supply of all that you stand in need of, so that Christ is daily regarded by you as your entire Saviour, your all in all? I pray you, let not this matter be thought of small import; No indeed. These things are not to be viewed as a mere theory, but as practical truths, upon the experience of which your everlasting salvation depends: and, if you die before they are realized by you in your daily experience, it will be better for you that you had never been born.

Here I might well close my subject. But, having taken hitherto only the more obvious and superficial view of it, I would, if it detain you not too long, briefly entreat your attention to some points which are more deep and recondite, and which, I hope, will repay the trespass which I thus reluctantly make upon your time.

^b Ps. lxi. 5.

^c Rom. vi. 14.

^d 1 Pet. i. 15, 16.

Mark then, I pray you, *how entirely salvation is of grace from first to last.* You have seen what provision God has made for us in our low estate. You have seen what he has laid up for us in Christ, and what Christ is made unto us, even all that we stand in need of. But you have not seen *how it is* that Christ is made all this to the believing soul. It is by our being "in Christ Jesus:" "Of him are ye *in Christ Jesus.*" Now we must be engrafted into Christ as scions, before we can partake of any of these things: we must be cut off from the old stock whereon we grew in our natural state, and be made living branches of Him the living Vine. And who, I beg leave to ask, can do this for us? It can be done by none but God, the great husbandman, who has himself ordained this as the only way of saving our ruined race. And this is *twice* marked in my text with very peculiar force and emphasis: "OF HIM are ye in Christ Jesus, who OF GOD is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Now I ask, who was it that gave *the Saviour to us*, or *us to him*? Who was it that accepted him in our behalf? Who was it that, after accepting his sacrifice in our behalf, constituted him our living Head, and treasured up in him such a fulness of all that we stood in need of? And who was it that cut us off from our old stock and grafted us into him? And who was it that by this mysterious process actually made us partakers of all these benefits? Hear it, and forget it not: "It is *of God* that ye are in Christ Jesus: and *of God* that Christ is made unto you all that you stand in need of." Let God then have all the glory. *This was the very end for which he did all this*, as he tells us both in the words that precede my text, and in the words that follow it: "God, says the Apostle, has chosen things which are not, to bring to nought things which are, *that no flesh should glory in his presence.* But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, that, *according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*"

Now I entreat your attention to this. Do not rob God of his glory. Do not ascribe any thing to yourselves, but give him the glory of your salvation from first to last. If you could go up to heaven, you would not find one soul there that arrogates any thing to himself. All with one heart and one voice are singing, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb;" to God, as the alone *Author* of salvation, and to the Lamb, as the only *means*: and I call on every one of you to begin this song on earth, giving all praise to God the Father as the source and fountain of your happiness, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has both purchased it for you by his blood, and imparted it to you by his Spirit. God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another: and if you rob him of his glory here, you shall not be partakers of it in the world to come.

Having called your attention to this, I next say, *seek this salvation in the precise way that God has appointed. Seek it in its full extent—seek it in its proper order—seek it for its only just and legitimate end—seek it with a confidence that you shall not seek in vain.*

Seek it in its full extent. Look to Christ for every thing without exception. Look to him for *wisdom*. Even though you be the most learned man on earth in respect of human sciences, you must look to him alone to instruct you in that which is divine. You must come to him even as a little child, to be taught of him; you must in your own apprehension "be a fool, if you would be truly wise^e." If you "lean to your own understanding," instead of relying upon the teaching of his Spirit, you will never attain true saving knowledge. If you would be made wise unto salvation, "your eyes must be anointed with the eye-salve which he alone can bestow^f." Look to him also for *righteousness*. There must be no dependence whatever on any thing of your own. There must be no attempt to blend your own righteousness with his. You must not even look to any

^e 1 Cor. iii. 18.

^f Rev. iii. 18.

attainments of your own, as your warrant to go to him, or to hope in him: your hope must be founded wholly on the sufficiency of his atonement, and the perfection of the righteousness which he wrought out for you. I do not mean that you are to be *remiss* in your obedience; but you are not to *rely upon* it. In point of dependence, your best deeds must be disclaimed as much as your worst. The fixed and habitual sentiment of your heart must be, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ^g." For *sanctification* also must you look to him, and *that* with as much earnestness, as if you were to be saved by your own works. Whilst I warn you that your own good works must be renounced in point of dependence, I would not have you imagine that you can ever be saved without them: No: I declare to every living man, that antinomianism is a horrible delusion, and a damning sin. God has plainly warned us, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" and that "every man who has a scriptural hope in Christ, must purify himself even as he is pure^h." Your complete *redemption* also must be received from Christ alone. You must "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesusⁱ." It is in his strength alone that you are to maintain your contest with your great adversary, for it is he alone that can "bruise Satan under your feet^k." And bear in mind, that no one of these things is to be separated from another. There must be no harbouring of philosophic pride, or of pharisaic self-righteousness, or of antinomian licentiousness: but the whole of Christ's benefits must be sought by you, without partiality and without hypocrisy^l."

Next, I would observe, these things must be sought *in their proper order*, that is, in the very order in which they are here proposed. Divine teaching must be sought in the first instance; for without *that*, you can know nothing either of your own need of Christ,

^g Heb. xii. 14.

^h 1 John iii. 3.

ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 1.

^k Rom. xvi. 20.

^l Jam. iii. 17.

or of his sufficiency. Then you must, as a poor perishing sinner, look to Christ, to wash you in his blood, and to clothe you in the unspotted robe of his righteousness. Then, having obtained a hope of acceptance through him, you must seek to be "sanctified throughout, in body, soul, and spirit." And further, having obtained a measure of holiness, you must not be self-confident, but, like the Apostle Paul, must "keep your body under, and bring it into subjection, lest after all your high professions, you prove a cast-away at last^m." To the latest hour of your life, you must retain the frame recommended by the Apostle, "Be not high-minded, but fear." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fallⁿ." And, whilst you acknowledge Christ as "the author of your faith," you must look to him, and to him alone, as "the finisher of it^o."

Further, seek all these blessings *for the only just and legitimate end*, the glory of God. The mind of all the glorified saints must be your mind. They all "prostrate themselves before the throne of God, and cast their crowns at the Saviour's feet^p." *They are nothing*; and *He is all*. This is the true end of all religion, "that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus^q." An adoring frame of mind is that which you should cultivate to your dying hour. Whilst you are in that frame, God, if I may so speak, is in his place, and you in yours. Even the angels that never sinned, are all upon their faces before God^r. Much more should you, who have never done any thing but sin, and yet have been redeemed from condemnation by the blood of your incarnate God. The higher you are exalted by God, the lower you must lie before him: and the deeper your sense of your own unworthiness, the more devoutly will you join in the song of the redeemed, "To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests

^m 1 Cor. ix. 27.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 2.

^q 1 Pet. iv. 11.

^p Rom. xi. 20. 1 Cor. x. 12.

^r Rev. iv. 10.

^r Rev. vii. 11.

unto God and the Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^s."

Lastly, seek these blessings *with a due confidence that you shall not seek in vain*. Recollect, who were the persons of whom these things were spoken? They were sinners of no common stamp. Such were the enormities which many of them had committed, that they seemed to be almost beyond the reach of mercy: yet of them was it said, "But *ye* are washed, but *ye* are sanctified, but *ye* are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God^t." Let none then entertain the doubt, 'Shall Christ be made all this to ME?' for he shall be so made to *every* believing soul; nor shall the vilest sinner in the universe be suffered to seek God's face in vain^u. Only let the pursuit of these things be your great object in life (for, what is there that can for a moment be put in competition with them?) and there shall not be a soul amongst us, who shall not be able to say, 'I am the happy person in whom all this blessedness is realized;' 'Of God am I in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto ME wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; and in him do I glory, yea and will glory throughout all the ages of eternity.' May this be the happy experience of us all, for Christ's sake! Amen and Amen.

^s Rev. i. 5, 6.

^t 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

^u Isai. xlv. 19.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOREGOING DISCOURSE.

We should consider in Sacred Scripture what is implied as well as what is expressed.

So did Christ (Matt. xxii. 32,) and so will we.

I. What is implied.

1. That we are destitute of all good in ourselves—
We are ignorant, guilty, polluted, and enslaved—
2. That we are incapable of attaining it by any power of our own—
We cannot remove any one of these; ignorance, guilt, pollution, or bondage.

11 What is expressed,

1. That God has treasured up for us in Christ all the good that we stand in need of—
He is the Vine and we the branches—
2. That he will impart it to every soul that believes in him—
Do we need wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption? He will make Christ all unto us.
Inquire whether He is made all this to you.

APPLICATION.

1. See how entirely salvation is of grace from first to last.
Who gave *the Saviour to us*? God alone.
Who gave *us to him*? God alone.
Both these things are marked in the text, and must be marked by us.
2. Seek it altogether in God's appointed way—
In its full extent—omitting none, preferring none—
In its proper order—the precise order stated in the text—
For its only just and legitimate end—God's glory—twice mentioned.
With full confidence that you shall not seek it in vain—
None can be more unworthy of it than the persons addressed in the text, 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

MDCCCCXXXIII.

CHRIST CRUCIFIED, OR EVANGELICAL RELIGION DESCRIBED.

1 Cor. ii. 2. *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

IN different ages of the world it has pleased God to reveal himself to men in different ways; sometimes by visions, sometimes by voices, sometimes by suggestions of his Spirit to their minds: but since the completion of the sacred canon, he has principally made use of his written word, explained and enforced by men, whom he has called and qualified to preach his Gospel; and though he has not precluded himself from conveying again the knowledge of his will in any of the former ways, it is through the written word only that we are now authorized to expect his gracious instructions. This, whether read by ourselves or published by his servants, he applies

to the heart, and makes effectual for the illumination and salvation of men. It must be confessed, however, that he chiefly uses the ministry of his servants, whom he has sent as ambassadors to a guilty world. It was thus that he conveyed the knowledge of salvation to the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was reading an interesting portion of Isaiah's prophecies. He might have opened the understanding of this man at once by the agency of his Spirit; but he chose rather to send his servant Philip, to join the chariot, and to explain the Scripture to him. When the Centurion also had sought with much diligence and prayer to know the way of salvation, God did not instruct him by his Word or Spirit, but informed him where to send for instruction; and by a vision removed the scruples of Peter about going to him; that so the established ministry might be honoured, and the Church might look to their authorized instructors, as the instruments whom God would make use of for their edification and salvation. Thus it is at this time: God is not confined to means; but he condescends to employ the stated ministry of his word for the diffusion of Divine knowledge: "The priests' lips keep knowledge;" and by their diligent discharge of their ministry is knowledge transmitted and increased.

But this circumstance, so favourable to all classes of the community, imposes on them a duty of the utmost importance. If there be a well from which we are to receive our daily supplies, it becomes us to ascertain that its waters are salubrious: and, in like manner, if we are to receive instruction from men, who are weak and fallible as ourselves, it becomes us to try their doctrines by the touchstone of the written word; and to receive from them those sentiments only which agree with that unerring standard; or, to use the words of an inspired Apostle, we must "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." To preachers also there arises an awful responsibility; for, as the people are "to receive the word at their mouth," and their "word is to be a savour of life or of death to all that hear it," it concerns them

to be well assured, that they set before their people "the sincere unadulterated milk of the word;" that in no respect they "corrupt the word of God," or "handle it deceitfully; but by manifestation of *the truth* commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God^a."

Hence it appears that we all are deeply interested in this one question, What is truth? what is that truth, which ministers are bound to preach, and which their people should be anxious to hear? There will however be no difficulty in answering this question, if only we consult the passage before us; wherein St. Paul explicitly declares what was the great scope of *his* ministry, and the one subject which *he* laboured to unfold. He regarded not the subtleties which had occupied the attention of philosophers; nor did he affect that species of knowledge which was in high repute among men: on the contrary, he studiously avoided all that gratified the pride of human wisdom, and determined to adhere simply to one subject, *the crucifixion of Christ for the sins of men*: "I came not unto you," says he, "with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God: for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

To explain and vindicate this determination of the Apostle is our intention in this discourse.

I. To explain it—

By preaching Christ crucified, we are not to understand that he dwelt continually on the *fact* or *history* of the crucifixion; for though he speaks of having "set forth Christ as it were crucified before the eyes" of the Galatians, and may therefore be supposed occasionally to have enlarged upon the sufferings of Christ as the means of exciting gratitude towards him in their hearts, yet we have no reason to think that he contented himself with exhibiting to their view a tragical scene, as though he hoped by *that* to

^a See 2 Cor. ii. 15—17. and iv. 2.

convert their souls: it was the *doctrine* of the crucifixion that he insisted on; and he opened it to them in all its bearings and connexions. This he calls "*the preaching of the cross*:" and it consisted of such a representation of "Christ crucified, as was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to the true believer, the power of God and the wisdom of God^b." There were two particular views in which he invariably spoke of the death of Christ; namely, as *the ground of our hopes*, and as *the motive to our obedience*.

In the former of these views, the Apostle not only asserts, that the death of Christ was the appointed means of effecting our reconciliation with God, but that it was the only means by which our reconciliation could be effected. He represents all, both Jews and Gentiles, as under sin, and in a state of guilt and condemnation: he states, that, inasmuch as we are all condemned by the law, we can never be justified by the law, but are shut up unto that way of justification which God has provided for us in the Gospel^c. He asserts, that "God hath set forth his Son to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness in the remission of sins, that he may be just, and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus^d." He requires all, Jews as well as Gentiles, to believe in Jesus, in order to the obtaining of justification by faith in him^e: and so jealous is he of every thing that may interfere with this doctrine, or be supposed to serve as a joint ground of our acceptance with God, that he represents the smallest measure of affiance in any thing else as actually making void the faith of Christ, and rendering his death of no avail^f. Nay, more, if he himself, or even an angel from heaven, should ever be found to propose any other ground of hope to sinful man, he denounces a curse against him; and, lest his denunciation should be overlooked, he repeats

^b 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.^c Gal. iii. 22, 23.^d Rom. iii. 25, 26.^e Gal. ii. 15, 16.^f Gal. v. 2-1.

it with augmented energy ; “ As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed ^ε.”

To the death of Christ he ascribes every blessing we possess. We are “ reconciled to God by the blood of his cross ;” we are “ brought nigh to him,” “ have boldness and access with confidence” even to his throne ; we “ are cleansed by it from all sin ;” yea, “ by his one offering of himself he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” But there is one passage in particular wherein a multitude of spiritual blessings are comprised, and all are referred to him as the true source from whom they flow. The passage we speak of, is in the first chapter to the Ephesians, where, within the space of eleven verses, the same truth is repeated at least eight or nine times. In order to enter fully into the force of that passage, we may conceive of St. Paul as maintaining the truth in opposition to all its most determined adversaries, and as labouring to the uttermost to exalt Christ in the eyes of those who trusted in him : we may conceive of him, I say, as contending thus : “ Have we been *chosen* before the foundation of the world ? it is *in Christ*. Have we been *predestinated* unto the adoption of children ? it is *in and by Him*. Are we *accepted* ? it is *in the Beloved*. Have we *redemption*, even the forgiveness of sins ? it is *in Him, through his blood*. Are all, both in heaven and earth, *gathered together* under one Head ? it is *in Christ, even in Him*. Have we *obtained an inheritance* ? it is *in Him*. Are we *sealed with the Holy Spirit* of promise ? it is *in Him*. Are we *blessed with all spiritual blessings* ? it is *in Christ Jesus*. When the Apostle has laboured thus to impress our minds with the idea that our whole salvation is in, and by, the Lord Jesus Christ, is it not surprising that any one should be ignorant of it ? Yet we apprehend that many persons, who have even studied the Holy Scriptures, and read over this passage a multitude of times, have yet never

seen the force of it, or been led by it to just views of Christ as the Fountain "in whom all fulness dwells," and "from whose fulness we must all receive, even grace for grace."

But we have observed, that there is another view in which the Apostle speaks of the death of Christ, namely, as *a motive to our obedience*. Strongly as he enforced the necessity of relying on Christ, and founding our hopes of salvation solely on his obedience unto death, he was no less earnest in promoting the interests of holiness. Whilst he represented the believers as "dead to the law" and "without law," he still insisted that they were "under the law to Christ," and as much bound to obey every tittle of it as ever^h; and he enforced obedience to it, in all its branches, and to the utmost possible extent. Moreover, when the doctrines which he had inculcated were in danger of being abused to licentious purposes, he expressed his utter abhorrence of such a procedureⁱ; and declared, that "the grace of God, which brought salvation, taught them, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world^k." A life of holy obedience is represented by him as the great object which Christ aimed to produce in all his people: indeed the very name, *Jesus*, proclaimed, that the object of his coming was "To save his people from their sins." The same was the scope and end of his death, even to "redeem them from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." His resurrection and ascension to heaven had also the same end in view; for "therefore he both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living." Impressed with a sense of these things himself, St. Paul laboured more abundantly than any of the Apostles in his holy vocation: he proceeded with a zeal which nothing could quench, and an ardour

^h 1 Cor. ix. 21. Gal. ii. 19.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 1, 15.

^k Tit. ii. 11, 12.

which nothing could damp : privations, labours, imprisonments, deaths, were of no account in his eyes ; “ none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto him, so that he might but finish his course with joy, and fulfil the ministry that was committed to him.” But what was the principle by which he was actuated ? He himself tells us, that he was impelled by a sense of obligation to Christ, for all that *He* had done and suffered for him : “ *the love of Christ* constraineth us,” says he ; “ because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead ; and that He died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again¹.” This is that principle which he desired to be universally embraced, and endeavoured to impress on the minds of all : “ We beseech you, brethren,” says he, “ by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service^m.” What mercies he refers to, we are at no loss to determine ; they are the great mercies vouchsafed to us in the work of redemption : for so he says in another place ; “ Ye are bought with a price ; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are hisⁿ.”

Now this is the subject which the Apostle comprehends under the term “ Christ crucified :” it consists of two parts ; first, of *affiance in Christ for salvation*, and, next, of *obedience to the law for his sake* : had either part of it been taken alone, his views had been imperfect, and his ministry without success. Had he neglected to set forth Christ as the only Saviour of the world, he would have betrayed his trust, and led his hearers to build their hopes on a foundation of sand. On the other hand, if he had neglected to inculcate holiness, and to set forth redeeming love as the great incentive to obedience, he would have been justly chargeable with that which has been often falsely imputed to him,—an antinomian spirit ; and

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.^m Rom. xii. 1.ⁿ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

his doctrines would have merited the odium which has most unjustly been cast upon them. But on neither side did he err: he forgot neither the foundation nor the superstructure: he distinguished properly between them, and kept each in its place: and hence with great propriety adopted the determination in our text.

Having explained his determination, we shall now proceed,

II. To vindicate it—

It was not from an enthusiastic fondness for one particular point, but from the fullest conviction of his mind, that the Apostle adopted this resolution: and so the word in the original imports; “I determined, as the result of my deliberate judgment, to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified: I have made it, and will ever make it, my theme, my boast, and my song.” The reasons why he insisted on this subject so exclusively, and with such delight, shall now be stated:—he did so,

1. Because *it contained all that he was commissioned to declare.*

“It pleased God to reveal his Son in the Apostle, that he might preach HIM among the heathen:” and accordingly St. Paul tells us, that “this grace was given to him to preach *the unsearchable riches* of Christ.” This, I say, was *his* office; and this too is the ministry of reconciliation which is committed to *ministers in every age*; “to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them^o.” To the Apostles, indeed, the commission was to “go forth into all the world, and to preach the Gospel to every creature;” whereas to us is assigned, as it were, a more limited *sphere*: but the *subject* of our ministry is the same with theirs: we have the same dispensation committed unto us; and “woe will be unto us, if we preach not the Gospel.”

But, as though men needed not to be evangelized

^o 2 Cor. v. 18, 19.

now, the term *evangelical* is used as a term of reproach. We mean not to justify any persons whatsoever in using unnecessary terms of distinction, more especially if it be with a view to depreciate others, and to aggrandize themselves: but still the distinctions which are made in Scripture must be made by us; else for what end has God himself made them? Now it cannot be denied, that the Apostle characterizes the great subject of his ministry as *the Gospel*; nor can it be denied that he complains of some teachers in the Galatian Church as introducing *another Gospel*, which was not the true Gospel, but a perversion of it^p. Here then he lays down the distinction between doctrines which are truly evangelical, and others which have no just title to that name. Of course, wherever the same difference exists between the doctrines maintained, the same terms must be proper to distinguish them; and a just view of those distinctions is necessary, in order to our being guarded against error, and established in the truth.

But we beg to be clearly understood in reference to this matter. It is not our design to enter into any dispute about the use of a *term*, or to vindicate any particular *party*; but merely to state, with all the clearness we can, a subject, about which every one ought to have the most accurate and precise ideas.

We have seen what was the great subject of the Apostle's preaching, and which he emphatically and exclusively called *the Gospel*: and if only we attend to what he has spoken in the text, we shall see what really constitutes evangelical preaching. *The subject* of it must be "Christ crucified;" that is, Christ must be set forth as the only foundation of a sinner's hope: and holiness in all its branches must be enforced; but a sense of Christ's love in dying for us must be inculcated, as the main-spring and motive of all our obedience. *The manner* of setting forth this doctrine must also accord with that of the Apostle in the text:

^p Gal. i. 6, 7.

the importance of the doctrine must be so felt, as to make us determine never to know any thing else, either for the salvation of our own souls, or for the subject of our public ministrations. Viewing its transcendent excellency, we must rejoice and glory in it ourselves, and shew forth its fruits in a life of entire devotedness to God : we must call upon our hearers also to rejoice and glory in it, and to display its sanctifying effects in the whole of their life and conversation. Thus to preach, and thus to live, would characterize a person, and his ministry, as evangelical, in the eyes of the Apostle : whereas indifference to this doctrine, or a corruption of it, either by a self-righteous or antinomian mixture, would render both the person and his ministry obnoxious to his censure, according to the degree in which such indifference, or such a mixture, prevailed. We do not mean to say, that there are not different degrees of clearness in the views and ministry of different persons, or that none are accepted of God, or useful in the Church, unless they come up to such a precise standard ;—nor do we confine the term evangelical to those who lean to this or that particular *system*, as some are apt to imagine :—but this we say, that, in proportion as any persons, in their spirit and in their preaching, accord with the example in the text, they are properly denominated *evangelical* ; and that, in proportion as they recede from this pattern, their claim to this title is dubious or void.

Now when we ask, What is there in this which every minister ought not to preach, and every Christian to feel ? Is there any thing in this enthusiastic ? any thing sectarian ? any thing uncharitable ? any thing worthy of reproach ? Is the Apostle's example in the text so absurd, as to make an imitation of him blame-worthy, and a conformity to him contemptible ? Or, if a scoffing and ungodly world will make the glorying in the cross of Christ a subject of reproach, ought any who are reproached by them to abandon the Gospel for fear of being called evangelical ? Ought they not rather, like the Apostles, “ to rejoice that

they are counted worthy to suffer shame, *if shame it be*, for Christ's sake?" The fact is indisputable, that the Apostle's commission was to preach Christ crucified;—to preach, I say, *that* chiefly, *that* constantly, *that* exclusively: and therefore he was justified in his determination to "know nothing else:" consequently, to adopt that same resolution is our wisdom also, whether it be in reference to our own salvation, or to the subject of our ministrations in the Church of God.

We now proceed to a *second* reason for the Apostle's determination. He determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified,—because *it contained all that could conduce to the happiness of man*. There are other things which may amuse; but there is nothing else that can contribute to man's real happiness. Place him in a situation of great distress; let him be bowed down under a sense of sin; let him be oppressed with any great calamity; or let him be brought by sickness to the borders of the grave;—there is nothing that will satisfy his mind, but a view of this glorious subject. Tell him of his good works; and he feels a doubt, (a doubt which no human being can resolve,) what is that precise measure of good works which will ensure eternal happiness: tell him of repentance, and of Christ supplying his deficiencies; and he will still be at a loss to ascertain whether he has attained that measure of penitence or of goodness, which is necessary to answer the demands of God. But speak to him of Christ as dying for the sins of men, as "casting out none that come unto him," as "purging us by his blood from all sin," and as clothing us with his own unspotted righteousness; yea, as making his own grace to abound, not only where sin has abounded, but infinitely beyond our most abounding iniquities^a; set forth to him thus the freeness and sufficiency of the Gospel salvation, and he wants nothing else: he feels that Christ is "a Rock, a sure Foundation;" and on that he builds without fear, assured that "whosoever believeth in Christ shall not be confounded."

^a Rom. v. 20, 21.

He hears the Saviour saying, "This is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent;" and having attained that knowledge, he trusts that the word of Christ shall be fulfilled to him: he already exults in the language of the Apostle, "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us^r."

But if a sense of guilt afflict some, a want of victory over their in-dwelling corruptions distresses others: and to them also the doctrine of Christ crucified administers the only effectual relief. The consideration of eternal rewards and punishments affords indeed a powerful incentive to exertion; but efforts springing from those motives only, will always savour of constraint; they will never be ingenuous, hearty, affectionate, unreserved. But let a sense of redeeming love occupy the soul, and the heart becomes enlarged, and "the feet are set at liberty to run the way of God's commandments" We say not that every person who *professes* to have experienced the love of Christ, will always walk consistently with that profession; for there were falls and offences not only in the apostolic age, but even among the Apostles themselves: but this we say, that there is no other principle in the universe so powerful as the love of Christ; that whilst that principle is in action, no commandment will ever be considered as grievous; the yoke of Christ in every thing will be easy, and his burden light; yea, the service of God will be perfect freedom; and the labour of our souls will be to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." This the Apostle found in his own experience; and this he found to be the effect of his ministry on the hearts of thousands. What then could he wish for in addition to this? Where this principle was inefficacious, nothing was effectual; and where this was effectual, nothing else was wanted: no wonder

^r Rom. viii. 34.

then that he determined to insist on this subject, and nothing else; since, whether in the removing of guilt from the conscience, or of corruption from the soul, nothing could bear any comparison with this.

Further, He determined to know nothing but this subject,—because *nothing could be added to it without weakening or destroying its efficacy*. The subject of Christ crucified may, as we have before observed, be considered as consisting of two parts,—a foundation, and a superstructure. Now St. Paul declares, that if any thing whatever be added to that foundation, it will make void the whole Gospel. If any thing could have been found which might safely have been added to it, we might suppose that the rite of circumcision might have claimed that honour, because it was of God's special appointment, and had had so great a stress laid upon it by God himself: but St. Paul says in reference to that rite, that if any person should submit to it with a view to confirm his interest in the Gospel, “Christ should profit him nothing:” such a person would have “fallen from grace,” as much as if he had renounced the Gospel altogether. Again, if any person, who had the foundation rightly laid within him, should build upon it any thing but the pure, the simple, the essential duties of religion, “his work should be burnt up as wood or stubble;” and though he should not entirely lose heaven, he should lose much of his happiness there, and be saved only like one snatched out of the devouring flames. With such a view of the subject, what inducement could the Apostle have to add any thing to it?

But the Apostle speaks yet more strongly respecting this. He tells us, not only that the adulterating of the subject by any base mixture will destroy its efficacy, but that even an artificial statement of the truth will make it of none effect. God is exceedingly jealous of the honour of his Gospel: if it be plainly and simply stated he will work by it, and make it effectual to the salvation of men; but if it be set forth with all the ornaments of human eloquence, and stated in “the words which man's wisdom teacheth,”

he will not work by it ; because he would have “ our faith to stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” Hence St. Paul, though eminently qualified to set it forth with all the charms of oratory, purposely laid aside “ all excellency of speech or of wisdom in declaring the testimony of God,” and “ used all plainness of speech,” lest by dressing up the truth “ in the enticing words of man’s wisdom, he should make the cross of Christ of none effect^s.”

Further vindication than this is unnecessary : for, if this subject contained all that he was commissioned to declare ; if it contained all that could conduce to the happiness of man ; and if nothing could be added to it without weakening or destroying its efficacy ; he must have consented to defeat the ends of his ministry altogether, if he had not adopted and maintained the resolution in the text.

If then these things be so, we may venture to found upon them the following ADVICE—

First, *Let us take care that we know Christ crucified—*

Many, because they are born and educated in a Christian land, are ready to take for granted that they are instructed in this glorious subject : but there is almost as much ignorance of it prevailing amongst Christians as amongst the heathen themselves. The name of Christ indeed is known, and he is complimented by us with the name of Saviour ; but the nature of his office, the extent of his work, and the excellency of his salvation, are known to few. Let not this be considered as a rash assertion : for we will appeal to the consciences of all ; Do we find that the Apostle’s views of Christ are common ? Do we find many so filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of this mystery, as to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of it ; and to say, like him, “ God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ?” On the contrary,

^s 1 Cor. i. 17. and ii. 1, 4, 5.

do we not find that there is an almost universal jealousy on the subject of the Gospel, that those who most labour to tread in the Apostle's steps, are often most branded with opprobrious names? Do we not find that his views of the Gospel are calumniated now, precisely as they were in the days of the Apostle himself? Verily, we should be glad to be found false witnesses in relation to these things; and would most joyfully retract our assertions, if it could be shewn that they are not founded in truth. We do hope however that there is an increasing love to the Gospel pervading the whole land; and I pray God it may prevail more and more, and be embraced by every one of us, not superficially, partially, theoretically, but clearly, fully, practically.

Secondly, *Let us adopt the Apostle's determination for ourselves—*

Doubtless, *as men and members of society*, there are many other things which we are concerned to know. Whatever be our office in life, we ought to be well acquainted with it, in order that we may perform its duties to the advantage of ourselves and others; and we would most particularly be understood to say, that the time that is destined for the acquisition of useful knowledge, ought to be diligently and conscientiously employed. But, *as Christians*, we have one object of pursuit, which deserves all our care and all our labour: yes, we may all with great propriety determine to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. This is the subject which even "the angels in heaven are ever desiring to look into," and which we may investigate for our whole lives, and yet leave depths and heights unfathomed and unknown. St. Paul, after preaching Christ for twenty years, did not conceive himself yet awhile to have attained all that he might, and therefore still desired to know Christ more and more, "in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his sufferings." This therefore *we* may well desire, and count all things but loss in comparison of it.

Lastly, *Let us make manifest the wisdom of our determination by the holiness of our lives.*

The doctrine of Christ crucified ever did, and ever will appear "foolishness" in the eyes of ungodly men; so that, if it be preached by an Apostle himself, he shall be accounted by them a babbler and deceiver. But there is one way of displaying its excellency open to us, a way in which we may effectually "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;" namely, "by well-doing;" that is, by shewing the sanctifying and transforming efficacy of this doctrine. St. Paul tells us, that "by the cross of Christ the world was crucified unto him, and he unto the world:" and such is the effect that it should produce on us: we should shew that we are men of another world, and men too of "a more excellent spirit:" we should shew the fruits of our faith in every relation of life: and, in so doing, we may hope to "win by our good conversation" many, who would never have submitted to the preached word.

But we must never forget where our strength is, or on whose aid we must entirely rely. The Prophet Isaiah reminds us of this; "Surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength:" and our Lord himself plainly tells us, that "without him we can do nothing." Since then "we have no sufficiency in ourselves to help ourselves," and God has "laid help for us upon One that is mighty," let us "live by faith on the Son of God," "receiving daily out of his fulness that grace" that shall be "sufficient for us." Let us bear in mind, that this is a very principal part of the knowledge of Christ crucified: for, as "all our fresh springs are in Christ," so must we look continually to him for "the supplies of his Spirit," and "have him for our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and redemption."

* Gal. vi. 14.

MDCCCXXXIV.

THE FEELINGS OF A FAITHFUL MINISTER.

1 Cor. ii. 3. *I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*

THERE was one subject on which St. Paul delighted chiefly to expatiate, which was, "Christ crucified;" a subject which to the Jews was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. The mode on which he insisted upon it, contributed to render it yet more distasteful to the philosophic reasoners of Greece and Rome: he laid aside all needless parade of wisdom, and all adventitious ornaments of rhetoric, and plainly declared the fact, that Christ was crucified for the sins of men. This he did, not because he was not able to express himself agreeably to the taste of men of learning, but because he was anxious "that the faith" of all who received the Gospel "should stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," accompanying a simple statement of the truth. It is probable, too, that somewhat in his speech and external form contributed to render him base and contemptible in the eyes of many^a. In addition to all this, the hostility of his enemies was most bitter, so that they sought by all possible means to destroy him. These diversified trials he sustained for the most part with great fortitude: but it seems that at Corinth his courage was in some degree shaken; for our blessed Lord, in order to comfort and encourage him, appeared to him in a vision, and bade him not be afraid, for that he would suffer none in that place to hurt him^b. To this state of mind he most probably alludes in the words before us, declaring, that, partly by his "fightings without and fears within," he had been "among them in weakness, and fear, and much trembling." But we must not confine the words to this sense: there can be no doubt but that he had many other sources of inward

^a 2 Cor. x. 1, 10. Gal. iv. 13.

^b Acts xviii. 9, 10.

trial, such as are common to all who execute the ministerial office. What these are, and what corresponding feelings they call for amongst a believing people, it is our present intention to inquire.

We will shew,

I. The feelings experienced by a faithful minister—

However light many think of the ministerial office, it is a situation of great difficulty, insomuch that there is not any truly faithful minister who does not find the expressions in our text exactly descriptive of his own feelings.

To the frame of mind here spoken of, he will of necessity be led,

1. From a view of the vast importance of his work—

[A minister is an ambassador from the court of heaven, empowered to declare to men the terms on which a reconciliation may be effected between God and them, and on which they who are now objects of God's righteous indignation may become monuments of his love and favour. A man who has the fate of an empire depending on him, sustains an arduous office: but all the empires upon earth are not of equal value with one soul. What a weight then has he upon him, who undertakes to negotiate a treaty between God and man,—a treaty, on the acceptance or rejection of which the everlasting salvation of hundreds, and perhaps of thousands, depends! Methinks this were an office for an angel, rather than a poor worm like ourselves: yet is it devolved on us: and every one who is able to estimate its importance, and desires to execute it with success, must needs execute it “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”]

2. From a sense of his own insufficiency to perform it—

[In one who would perform this office aright, there ought to be a combination of all that is good and great. There need not indeed be the same *kind* of knowledge, or the same *species* of talent as would be necessary for a person entrusted with the *political* interests of men: but there should be a deep insight into the great mystery of redemption; a comprehensive view of it, as founded in the necessities of our fallen nature, and adapted to all our wants. There should be an ability to bring forth out of the inexhaustible stores that are contained in the sacred volume, whatever is best fitted for the establishment

of sound doctrine and the refutation of error, as also for the correction of every thing that is wrong in practice, and the promotion of universal righteousness^c: he should be “a scribe well instructed unto the kingdom of God,” and able to meet every case with suitable instruction. He should also be endued with such grace, as to exemplify in his own spirit and conduct all that he teaches to others; being “an example to believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity^d.” But, as St. Paul himself says, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Who that has any consciousness of his own ignorance and sinfulness, does not tremble at the idea of his own utter inadequacy to the work assigned him?

3. From a consideration of his own awful responsibility—

[We are constituted watchmen to the house of Israel; and are warned beforehand, that if any soul shall perish through our neglect, his “blood shall be required at our hand^e :” and on this account we are told to “watch for souls, as those who must give account^f.” But who can reflect on this, and not tremble? It is an awful thought, that we must every one of us answer for ourselves: but how much more, that we must give an account of the hundreds and thousands that are committed to our charge! Verily, if there were not a God of *infinite* mercy to pity our weakness and to pardon our defects, I know not who would dare to undertake the office. Whenever we hear the bell announcing the death or funeral of one that was under our care, we are constrained to ask, What was the state of that soul? Did I do all that I could for him whilst he was alive? Can I say as before God, that “I am pure from his blood?” Ah, brethren! this is sometimes a heavy load upon the mind; for, of all the people upon the face of the earth, the man who most stands in need of superabounding grace and mercy, is he who has the care of souls committed to him: and the minister that does not tremble at this thought, has, above all men in the world, the most need to tremble.]

4. From an apprehension lest his labour should after all be in vain—

[The labours of Jesus himself, and of all his Apostles, were, with respect to the great mass of their hearers, in vain: no wonder, therefore, that it is so with respect to us. And what a distressing thought is this, that we eventually increase the guilt and condemnation of vast multitudes, over whom we have wept, and for whose salvation we have laboured! The

^c 2 Tim. iii. 16.

^e Ezek. xxxiii. 6—8.

^d 1 Tim. iv. 12.

^f Heb. xiii. 17.

word which we preach to them, if it be not “a savour of life unto life, becomes to them a savour of death unto death^g.” If we had not laboured among them, “they would not, comparatively, have had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin^h:” the more they are, like Capernaum, exalted in their privileges, the more deeply will they be cast down into hell for their abuse of themⁱ. Who that has a spark of compassion in his soul, can look around him on the multitudes who have hitherto withstood his efforts for their good, and not weep over them? Who, when he reflects, that, with respect to many, his commission will prove only like that delegated to Isaiah, “Go, and make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed^k;” who, I say, can reflect on this, and not be “in weakness, and fear, and much trembling;” more especially when he considers how much the failure may have been owing to his own deficiencies?

Such then are, and ought to be, the feelings of all who have learned to estimate aright the difficulties and dangers of the ministerial office.]

Corresponding with these are,

II. The feelings called for in a believing people—

These, it is true, are not expressly mentioned in our text; but they are so closely connected with the foregoing subject, that we must on no account omit to notice them.

Two things are evidently CALLED FOR on the part of those who are blessed with such a minister:

1. A reciprocal concern for his welfare—

[Whilst he is thus “travailing, as it were, in birth with them,” they should be deeply concerned for him, and study by all possible means to strengthen his hands and to comfort his heart. They should co-operate with him in every labour of love; they should, as far as their influence extends, endeavour to confirm his word, and to advance his work. In their own families, especially, they should be labourers together with him. Above all, they should assist him daily with their prayers. How often does the Apostle say, “Brethren, pray for us^l!” yea, with what extreme earnestness did he entreat this succour from the Church at Rome; “I beseech you, brethren, for the

^g 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^k Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^h John xv. 22.

^l 1 Thess. v. 25. Heb. xiii. 18.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 22—24.

Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me^m!" To this he confidently looked, as to an infallible source of blessings to his own soulⁿ, and of success to his ministerial exertions^o! This therefore is the duty of every one, in return for those efforts which his minister is using for his good. Intercession is an ordinance of God; and is replete with benefit invariably to those who use it, and most generally to those in whose behalf it is used. Does your minister then stand in need of wisdom, of zeal, of patience, of love, of all manner of gracious communications? be instant in prayer for him, that he may receive from the fulness that is in Christ all seasonable and necessary supplies. Without such co-operation on your part he can scarcely hope to bear up under the pressure of the load that is laid upon him. He is ready at times to complain, as Moses did under the weight that had been laid upon him: "Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burthen of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me^p." Learn then, brethren, to sympathize with him; and "labour fervently and without ceasing in prayer to God for him, that he may be enabled to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^q."

2. An anxious desire to answer the end of his exertions—

[Is a minister thus deeply exercised for his people's good, and should not they be anxious for their own? Is he harassed with unremitting solicitude, and should they be sitting in a state of indifference? Know, brethren, that the very circumstance of God's having set apart an order of men to labour for your souls, is a very abundant proof that your souls are of an inestimable value, and that all the anxiety you can feel is less than they call for at your hands. Do but consider, that every moment you are ripening either for heaven or for hell; every action, every word, and every thought, is enhancing either your happiness or misery for ever. More particularly are you responsible for all the means of grace which you enjoy, and for all the efforts which are used for your salvation. Should not this thought fill you with fear and trembling, more especially

^m Rom. xv. 30.

ⁿ Phil. i. 19.

^o 2 Cor. i. 11. Eph. vi. 18, 19.

^p Numb. xi. 11, 12, 14.

^q Col. iv. 12.

when you look back upon the opportunities which you have neglected to improve? Have you no reason to fear, lest he who seeks your eternal welfare, and longs above all things to have you as his "joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day," should, after all, be a swift witness against you to your everlasting confusion? Begin then, if you have not yet begun, to cherish this salutary fear. Remember, what his object is; and then inquire, whether that object have been attained in you. It is not to an approbation of his ministry, or to a mere profession of the truth, that he wishes to convert you, but to a cordial acceptance of the Gospel salvation, and an entire surrender of your souls to God. Less than this will not answer the ends of his ministry, or bring any substantial blessing on your own souls. I pray you, examine well how far this good work has been wrought within you; and learn to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling." We do not mean that you should be kept in a state of *slavish* fear; for the very scope and intent of the Gospel is to "cast out all such fear as hath torment." It is a *filial* fear that we recommend to you; and it is a *filial* fear that we would cultivate ourselves: but the more that abounds in ministers and people, the more will the work of God flourish among them, and God himself be glorified in the midst of them.]

MDCCCCXXXV.

APOSTOLIC PREACHING.

1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. *My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

IN the education of persons for the ministry, it is justly thought that all possible attention should be paid to the attainment of whatever may render them eminent in their profession, and useful in the Church of God. Yet it may well be doubted whether a proper distinction be made between the *acquisition* of knowledge and the *use* of it. A man cannot *acquire* too much; but he may *use* his knowledge unprofitably, and even injuriously, in the discharge of his holy calling. There is, in the truths which he has to deliver, a dignity, which would be obscured by the artificial ornaments of human oratory. Hence St. Paul, even when at Corinth, where human eloquence

was in high request, forbore to comply with the prevailing taste, lest, by yielding to it, "he should make the cross of Christ of none effect^a." Nor did he apologize for this departure from their established usages: on the contrary, he vindicates it, and assigns what they could not but acknowledge to be an abundantly sufficient reason for his conduct.

That we may not lose the benefit of his example, I will enter more particularly into the consideration of it; and shew,

I. How St. Paul conducted himself in his pastoral office—

It is evident that he here contrasts his own conduct with that of their most celebrated instructors, whom they were wont to admire. The philosophers, whom they had followed, were fond of displaying the profoundness of their own wisdom, and the extent of their own researches: and they were admired in proportion as they were able to maintain their theories with logical subtlety and plausible argumentation. Their great orators, too, to whom they had been wont to listen with delight, had filled their discourses with all the flowers of rhetoric, that, by pleasing the imagination of their hearers, they might suspend the severer exercises of judgment, and persuade beyond the just impulse of deliberate conviction. But to none of these artifices would the Apostle condescend.

He conducted his ministrations with the utmost simplicity—

[He was himself a man of great talent: having been educated under the most celebrated teacher, and made a proficiency in knowledge beyond most of his fellow-students; so that, if he had judged it expedient, he could have moved with celebrity in the path which the most distinguished philosophers had trod. But he disdained to seek his own glory in the discharge of his sacred office: he therefore would have nothing to do with "the enticing words of man's wisdom." He had received a message, which he was anxious to deliver; and, in delivering it, "he used great plainness of speech." He

^a 1 Cor. i. 17.

looked not to the powers of language, to impress the minds of his hearers, but to the Spirit of the living God; whose energy needed no artificial aid, and whose power was amply sufficient to carry conviction to the soul. He was taught to expect from God such attestations to his word. He was enabled, indeed, to confirm his word with signs and miracles: but it was to the mighty working of the Spirit of God upon the souls of men that he chiefly looked; and, in dependence upon that, he laboured both in public and in private. "His speech," when conversing with individuals, and "his preaching" before assembled thousands, were both of the same character. To make known the mystery of redemption through our incarnate God was the office committed to him: and he determined to execute it with all simplicity of mind; "knowing nothing amongst his people but Jesus Christ, and him crucified."]

In this he had respect to the best interests of mankind—

[The very aim of the principal philosophers was to establish dogmas of their own, which were to be received by their followers as characteristic of the sect to which they belonged. But St. Paul would not have the faith of his hearers to stand on the dictates of human wisdom. The word was God's: the power that alone could make it effectual was God's: nor could it be of any real service to the souls of men, any further than it was applied with power from on high. However the people might accede to it as a truth, that they were corrupt and helpless creatures, they could not feel it aright, unless they were taught it by God himself. And, however they might be persuaded that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of the world, they could not believe in him to the salvation of their own souls, unless that faith should be wrought in them by the Holy Ghost. In like manner, every truth of Christianity must be experimentally received, and divinely communicated: and therefore the Apostle would not run the risk of having any of its efficacy imputed to his statements: he would have the faith of all its adherents to be purely and undeniably the offspring of a divine power; so that God alone might be glorified in every believing soul.]

Such was the character of St. Paul's ministry. Let me now suggest,

II. The hints which we may derive from it in the relation in which we stand—

If St. Paul was an example to us *as a Christian*, he was not less so *as a Minister*. Now, from his mode of ministering, some important hints arise,

1. To those who preach—

[We have the very same message to deliver as that which was committed to the Apostle Paul. And, though we cannot hope, like him, to have our word confirmed with miracles, we may hope that it shall be accompanied with power from on high, to the conviction and consolation of those who hear us. On us, therefore, the same obligation lies, to wave the use of all rhetorical ornaments, and of artificial statements that savour of human wisdom; and to look to the influences of the Holy Spirit to render our word effectual for the good of men. The same holy watchfulness should be found in us respecting the honour of God in the work of man's salvation. Were our talents ever so great, we ought to deem the exercise of them, in dispensing the Gospel, a matter of extreme care and jealousy. I mean not that they are to be laid aside; for they may be employed to good purpose: but they are not to be employed for the purpose of display, or to exalt our own wisdom: they must be improved only for the purpose of unfolding more clearly the great mysteries of the Gospel, and of rendering them more intelligible to the meanest capacity. The object which we should ever keep in view should be, to have our word accompanied with a divine unction to the souls of men, and to see faith wrought in their hearts with a divine power.]

2. To those who hear—

[The same simplicity of mind as befits your minister, becomes you also. You should not wish for displays of oratory, or affect that preaching which savours of human wisdom: you should desire only "the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby." You should be on your guard against adopting the Shibboleth of a party, or the dogmas of any particular sect: beware, too, of becoming followers of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, as your own carnal prejudices may incline you: you must receive the truth as little children; and embrace it, "not as the word of man, but as the word of God." If rightly ministered, the Gospel will "be declared to you as the testimony of God" respecting his dear Son^b. Now, a testimony is not received on account of the figures with which it is embellished, but on account of its intrinsic importance, and the veracity of him by whom it is borne: and in this precise way must you receive the testimony of God, who says, that "He has given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son; and that he who hath the Son, hath life; and he who hath not the Son of God, hath not life^c." To know this truth, to feel its importance, to taste its sweetness, and to experience its sanc-

^b ver. 1.^c 1 John v. 11, 12.

tifying and saving efficacy, *this* must be your end in attending on the ministry; and, in comparison of this, all gratifications resulting from a display of human wisdom ought to be lighter than vanity itself.]

IN CONCLUSION, let me recommend to you,

1. That you form a right judgment respecting spiritual edification—

[There is scarcely any subject on which the Christian world are more in error than this. If persons are pleased with the talents of a preacher, they are ready to suppose that they are edified: but real edification consists in our being more humbled, more quickened, more strengthened in the service of our God: and whatever produces not these effects, however it may please us, is only as a musical exhibition, which leaves us as carnal and corrupt as we were before^d.]

2. That you seek edification in the way in which alone it can be obtained—

[God alone can work it in the soul: “Though Paul should plant, or Apollos water, it is God alone that can give the increase^e.” You must cry to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit; and beg that “the word may come to you, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance^f.” To Him you must look in prayer, *before you come up hither*; and *whilst you are hearing* the word; and *when you go hence*: then may you hope that the word shall be clothed with energy, and prove “The power of God to the salvation of your souls.”]

^d Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. ^e 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. ^f 1 Thess. i. 5.

MDCCCCXXXVI.

WISDOM OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Cor. ii. 6. *We speak wisdom among them that are perfect.*

THESE words appear, at first sight, to have an air of conceit and arrogance: and, if uttered by an uninspired man in reference to lucubrations of his own, they might perhaps be not unjustly condemned, as betraying in the speaker, and generating in the hearers, the unhallowed feelings of pride and self-sufficiency. But, as spoken by the holy Apostle,

they are open to no such unfavourable construction. If we were to understand by them, that the Apostle held one doctrine amongst those who were initiated into the secrets of his mind, and another amongst his less-instructed disciples, we could by no means justify him in such a conduct; for he would then resemble those philosophers of old, who, in private, exposed the fallacy of popular errors, which in their public discourses they upheld and sanctioned. *This* the Apostle never did. If he brought some things to the view of his more enlightened followers, which he forbore to state to others, it was not from any doubt of the truth of the sentiments which he concealed, or from any fear of incurring the displeasure of men by the promulgation of them; but only from a condescension to the weakness of those whose organs of vision were not capable of sustaining the flood of light which he was able to pour upon them. From such motives he certainly did, on many occasions, withhold truths from those who were unable to bear them, and content himself with administering milk to those who were incapable of digesting strong meat^a. But this is not the import of the passage before us. The simple meaning of it is, that whilst the great subject of his ministrations was by many of his hearers regarded as “foolishness,” it was, in the eyes of those who properly understood it, “wisdom.”

His words will naturally lead me to shew,

I. What the true character of the Gospel is—

The Gospel which the Apostle preached was, salvation through a crucified Redeemer: “I determined,” says he, “to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

Now this, whatever an ignorant and ungodly world may say of it, is “wisdom.”

It is indeed a “*hidden*” wisdom—

[It was hid from all eternity in the bosom of the Father: nor had the first Archangel any conception of it, till it was

^a 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 11—14.

revealed to man in Paradise: and all the knowledge which is at this very hour possessed by the Principalities and Powers of heaven respecting it, is derived to them through the progressive revelation made of it to the Church by the Prophets and Apostles of succeeding ages^b. Even under the Mosaic dispensation it was for the most part "hidden:" because the types and ceremonies, by which it was adumbrated, cast so thick a veil over it, that it could scarcely be discerned at all; and the very prophets who foretold it were unable to unravel the mysteries which they proclaimed to us^c. The things which it unfolds to our view are perfectly different from any thing that ever entered into the minds of uninspired men^d: and at this moment are they "hidden from the wise and prudent, even whilst they are revealed unto babes^e."]]

But in it is contained the "manifold" wisdom of God^f—

[It was "ordained of God before the world, for our glory," even for the salvation of our souls. And in this "great mystery^g" we may behold his *inventive* wisdom, his *administrative* wisdom, his *effective* wisdom.

No finite intelligence could have conceived such a plan of rescuing from perdition our fallen race, without dishonouring that law which we had violated, and suspending the sentence which justice had denounced. He alone, "whose understanding is unsearchable," was capable of devising a plan whereby the offence might be punished, and the offender saved.

But how shall this plan be executed? If it be not made known, none can avail themselves of it: and if it be known, it can never be carried into effect: for who would ever dare to lay his hands upon *his incarnate God*, and inflict on *him* the things which he was doomed to bear? The Apostle himself tells us, that "if the princes of this world had known what they were doing, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory^h." And, now that the plan is executed, how shall the benefits of it be so imparted, that, whilst no room is left for any man to glory, the sovereignty of God shall not supersede, or in any degree interfere with, the free agency of man? Who but God could divine this?

Again: shall any thing be left to chance? Shall it be uncertain whether, after all, God's ends shall be attained? No: man *shall* have the benefit; and God the glory. God will "give a people to his Son, whom he shall have for an inheritanceⁱ." "A seed shall serve him^k:" and, however far off they

^b Eph. iii. 9, 10.

^c 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

^d ver. 9.

^e Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^f Note ^b.

^g ver. 7. with 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^h ver. 8.

ⁱ Ps. ii. 8.

^k Ps. xxii. 30.

may be, God will apprehend them, and bring them to his Son^l, and “keep them unto the end,” and “perfect in them the good work he has begun^m.” Of those whom from eternity he has given to his Son, “not one shall be lostⁿ,” “not one be ever plucked out of his hands^o.” At the same time, all his own perfections shall be glorified; justice in punishing the offence, and mercy in pardoning the offender: yea, mercy shall be the more magnified, because it is exercised in a way of justice; and justice, because it is honoured in a way of mercy.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out^p!” This indeed may be said in reference to any single part of his plan: and, if so, how much more in reference to the whole stupendous mystery, in all its branches! Verily, in the mystery of redemption, as viewed in all its parts, there “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge^q,” inasmuch that, though they shall be progressively unfolding to all eternity, they shall never be fully seen, never adequately comprehended.]

Such, then, being the true character of the Gospel, we proceed to shew,

II. Whence it is that the godly alone view it in its true light—

The persons here called “perfect,” are the same as in the foregoing chapter are called “the saved^r,” and “the called^s.” As for absolute perfection, there is no such thing to be found in any child of man^t. But persons are sometimes called “perfect,” as having grown from children to man’s estate^u; and sometimes as being truly upright in opposition to the unbelieving and ungodly world^x. It is in this latter sense that the term “perfect” is used in our text. These persons, though they be only babes, behold a wisdom in the Gospel; though doubtless their insight into the glory and excellency of the Gospel is deep in proportion to the attainments they have made in the Divine life.

Now these persons alone behold the wisdom of the Gospel,

^l John vi. 37.

^m Phil. i. 6.

ⁿ John xviii. 9.

^o John x. 28, 29.

^p Rom. xi. 33.

^q Col. ii. 3.

^r 1 Cor. i. 18.

^s 1 Cor. i. 24.

^t Phil. iii. 12.

^u See 1 Cor. xiv. 20. and Heb. v. 14. both of them in the Greek.

^x Job i. 1. Matt. xix. 21. Phil. iii. 15.

1. Because they alone feel their need of the salvation revealed in it—

[Others know not their lost estate: they see no such evil in sin, but that it may be atoned for by some little act of penance, and be counterbalanced by a few self-righteous and formal services. What then can they want of such a provision as the Gospel has made for their reconciliation with God? What need have they, that Almighty God should become incarnate, and offer himself a sacrifice for their sins? What need have they to plead the merits of a dying Saviour, when their own will suffice? What need have they that the Holy Ghost should come down and dwell in their hearts, when they have a sufficiency of strength within themselves for every service which they are called to perform? But the man who knows how low he has fallen, and how utterly impossible it is that he should ever reconcile himself to God, or attain by any obedience of his own a righteousness in which he may stand before God, will be filled with amazement at the revelation which is made in the Gospel, and at the stupendous mystery there contained: in whatever light it be viewed by others, it will in his eyes be “the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”]

2. Because they alone seek to be instructed in it—

[Others “lean to their own understanding;” and, being “wise in their own conceits,” “they are taken by God in their own craftiness.” Not so the humble inquirer. To him is imparted “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God’s dear Son; so that the eyes of his understanding are opened^a;” and he is enabled to discern with clearness and certainty “the things which are freely given to him of God^b.” By this divine Agent he is led to view “the deep things of God^c;” and to comprehend, in a measure, the depth and height and length and breadth of that love of Christ, which, in its full extent, is utterly incomprehensible^d.]

3. Because they alone are willing to embrace its self-denying doctrines—

[Others are offended at the humiliation it requires: nor can they endure to renounce the world, and to live only for God and for eternity. In justification of themselves, therefore, they “*deride*” what they choose not to embrace^e. But the man whose heart is right with God wishes to be humbled in the very dust as a hell-deserving sinner, and delights in

^y 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. ^z 1 Cor. i. 19. and iii. 19.

^a Eph. i. 18, 19. ^b ver. 12. ^c ver. 10. ^d Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^e See, and mark particularly in this view, Luke xvi. 14.

“receiving every thing out of the fulness” that is treasured up for him in Christ. Could he have the desire of his soul, he would be “holy as God himself is holy,” and “perfect as his Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Hence, when he finds in the Gospel every thing that he stands in need of, wisdom for the ignorant, righteousness for the guilty, sanctification for the polluted, and redemption for the enslaved, he cannot but adore the wisdom that has ordained so mysterious, so effectual, a salvation.]

4. Because these alone give themselves up to the contemplation of it—

[Others “let slip all that they hear,” having no wish to treasure it up in their minds. But the truly upright lay up the word in their hearts, (even as Mary did the words of her youthful Son;) yea, and meditate upon it day and night. They resemble in this respect the holy angels, who are represented as bending down upon the ark, and inspecting with all possible care the law contained in it^f. No wonder they are instructed; no wonder the veil is taken from their hearts: for God has said, “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.”

Hence, then, we see the grounds on which the perfect man admires as “wisdom” what all the world besides regard as folly. Being enabled by God to discern its suitableness, and to experience its sufficiency, he glories in it as the perfection of wisdom, and as a comprehensive summary of all that is good and great.]

Now, as in the text are mentioned the speaker and the hearers—the one delivering with confidence, and the others receiving with submission, the dictates of inspiration—I will, in CONCLUSION, address myself,

1. To those whose office it is, or may hereafter be, to preach the Gospel—

[The Apostle, knowing the Gospel to be the very wisdom of God himself, was extremely careful to deliver it with the utmost simplicity. He was able to preach it “with wisdom of words,” and to set it forth with all the powers of language, if he had been so inclined: but he would not do so, “lest he should make the cross of Christ of none effect^g.” He appeals to the Corinthians themselves, that he had “come to them not with excellency of speech or of human wisdom^h,” being anxious “that their faith should stand, not in the wisdom of

^f 1 Pet. i. 12.

^g 1 Cor. i. 17.

^h ver. 1, 4.

man, but in the power of Godⁱ. Now, in this he has set us an example which we ought carefully to follow. We greatly err, if we hope by any meretricious ornaments to embellish the Gospel of Christ. *That* appears most beautiful, when it is exhibited most simply in its own native form. The whole world would in vain attempt to add any thing to light: and equally vain will be any endeavour to exalt the Gospel by the gaudy trappings of rhetorical expressions. It is by the plain exhibition of a crucified Saviour that God will work. On the wisdom of the wise he will pour contempt: but "by the foolishness of preaching," that is, by such preaching as the wise of this world account foolishness, "he will save them that believe." Let ministers then learn from hence how to preach the Gospel, remembering that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men^k." We may by our additions weaken the Gospel of Christ; but we can never strengthen its efficacy by any thing that we can add. It is in itself "the rod of God's strength:" and, if we wield it faithfully, all the powers of darkness shall fall before it.]

2. To those who hear the Gospel—

[You must seek to attain simplicity of mind, even the simplicity of little children. "If you would be wise, you must become fools that you may be wise^l." It is the truth of God that you are to regard, and not the human eloquence with which it may be proclaimed. You must "hear the word," not as the word of man, but of God." You must hear it as God's word to your own selves in particular; and must "receive it with meekness, as an engrafted word, able to save your souls^m." Let this thought be duly impressed upon your minds, and it will operate powerfully to counteract that sad propensity which is in us to set up one preacher above another, because of his peculiar gifts and talents. For what is any man, but a mere instrument of God, whereby God himself was pleased to work upon youⁿ? Whether it was "Paul who planted, or Apollos who watered, it was God alone who gave the increase:" and therefore "neither Paul nor Apollos should be any thing in your estimation, (except as you may love them for their works' sake,) but God who gave the increase." The praise and glory should be His alone^o.

On the other hand, neither should you despise the word, because it is delivered in weakness. God is often pleased to "magnify his own strength in the weakness" of his instru-

ⁱ ver. 5, 13.

^m Jam. i. 21.

^k 1 Cor. i. 25.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 5.

^l 1 Cor. iii. 18.

^o 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

ments^p. He has “put his treasure into earthen vessels for this very end^q :” and, if you will look to him for his blessing on the word, he will “ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings^r,” and “enrich you by those who are the poorest in themselves^s.”

Only seek to behold and to admire the wisdom of God in his Gospel; and you shall find it to be “the power of God to the salvation of your souls^t.”]

^p 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^q 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^r Ps. viii. 2.

^s 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^t Rom. i. 16.

MDCCCCXXXVII.

MYSTERIOUSNESS OF THE GOSPEL.

1 Cor. ii. 7. *We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery.*

AMONGST persons of intelligence, nothing is so highly esteemed as wisdom. And well may it be preferred to every other attainment; because it elevates its possessor in the scale of being, and assimilates him to the highest order of finite intelligences. Even the wisdom that is merely human is deservedly ranked far above all the riches or honours of the world: and much more does divine wisdom merit this place in the estimation of mankind. It is of this latter wisdom in particular that we are now to speak. But, in truth, it far exceeds all human comprehension: for it is the wisdom of God himself; and that wisdom, too, in a mystery, that from all eternity was hid in the bosom of the Most High. Yet is it sufficiently intelligible to answer all the purposes for which it has been revealed, and to enrich the souls of all to whom the attainment of it is vouchsafed. That which contains it all is the Gospel: and it is my intention, at this time, to *shew what there is in the Gospel which entitles it to this high character*. There are four things, which I will specify:

I. The profundity of its principles—

The great principle of the Gospel is precisely that which was typified under the Law—*Reconciliation*

with God through the sacrifice of his Son. Contemplate this :

Reconciliation with God !

[What a mystery ! Consider the greatness of the Divine Majesty : consider the meanness and worthlessness of the human race, who, whether they were annihilated, or consumed in the regions of eternal misery, would not be missed from the creation of God ; who needs them not, nor can receive any thing from them ; and who could, if he pleased, by a mere act of volition, create millions of holy beings to supply their place. Why are they not left to their fate ? Why does the Most High God concern himself about them ? Why, when they have sinned like the fallen angels, are they not left, like them, to reap the bitter fruit of their wickedness ? How can we conceive that God should ever think of being reconciled to such rebellious creatures ? Even if a proposal to this effect had first come from man, we could not conceive that God should ever accede to it : how much less then can we imagine, that when no such desire was evinced by man, the proposal should ever originate with our offended God ?

But contemplate further,]

Reconciliation by sacrifice !

[What can there be in sacrifice that should answer any such end as this ? How can that which is innocent be substituted in the place of the guilty ? If such a proposal were made, how could a holy God acquiesce in it ? And where could a victim be found ? Shall the blood of bulls and of goats take away sin ? Impossible. Should the highest archangel offer himself for us ? What could he effect, either by doing or suffering, for us ? What could he do, beyond what he is by the very law of his creation bound to do ? or what could any sufferings of his avail for expiating the guilt of a fallen world ? But contemplate yet further,]

Reconciliation by the sacrifice of God's only dear Son !

[Impossible ! The co-equal, co-eternal Son of God be given for such an end ! The eternal God become a man ! The Creator of all things substitute himself in the place of his creatures ! The Lord of Life and Glory die, and bear the curse due to sin, yea, and expiate thereby the guilt of the very persons who nailed him to the cross ! Truly, if God has revealed all this in his Gospel, it must be true : but nothing less than the most unquestionable evidence of such a revelation having actually proceeded from God can warrant us to entertain the thought of a reconciliation effected by such means as these.]

But, to get a clearer insight into the mystery of the Gospel, let us notice,

II. The comprehensiveness of its provisions—

Nothing in it is wanting that can contribute to,

1. The honour of God—

[Were the Gospel at all deficient in this view, it would be impossible for God to approve of it. But there is not a perfection of the Deity which is not honoured by it. The justice of God has all its demands satisfied: the holiness of God is displayed in the brightest colours: his truth is kept inviolate: yea, all the perfections of God are more glorified in this way of exercising mercy, than they would have been if man had never fallen, or never been redeemed. In truth, it is this which gives to the Gospel its chief value: it is valuable, doubtless, as saving man; but it is infinitely more valuable as displaying and magnifying the glory of God.]

2. The salvation of man—

[Needs fallen man *the removal of his guilt*? it is removed from him, as far as the east is from the west, by virtue of this sacrifice. Be it so: the debt we had contracted was infinite: but infinite also was the value of that blood which was shed to expiate our guilt; so that justice itself, being satisfied by our Surety, has nothing to demand at our hands. Does man need also *the renovation of his nature*? For this also is ample provision made, seeing that by virtue of the blood of Christ the gift of the Holy Spirit is purchased for us; by whose Almighty agency every child of man may be renewed and sanctified, yea, and transformed also into the very image of his God. Does he need yet further *a perfect righteousness wherein to stand before God*? This, too, is secured to him by Christ's obedience unto death: for by that a righteousness is formed perfectly commensurate with all the requirements of the law; and it is imputed to every believing soul; so that, clothed in it, he stands perfect and complete before God, without spot or blemish. Nothing that can in any way contribute to a man's peace of conscience, or holiness of life, or meetness for glory, is wanting in this stupendous mystery: all is provided for; all is secured: and in every part of it the wisdom of God is incomprehensibly and unsearchably displayed.]

The mysteriousness of the Gospel will yet further appear, if we notice,

III. Its remoteness altogether from human apprehension—

Supposing man to be informed that God had designs of mercy towards him, in what way would he expect it to be exercised? He would look for it,

1. In a way of mere gratuitous forgiveness—

[He would never once have the remotest idea of an atonement. It would appear in his eyes a perfect absurdity. In fact, it did so appear “both to the Jews and Gentiles; being to the one a stumbling-block, and to the others foolishness.” In this light it does appear to the wise and prudent of the present day. For, though the general notion of an atonement may be admitted, and even contended for, by many, *as a sentiment* in opposition to Socinians and Deists, it is really approved by those only who are taught of God the truth as it is in Jesus. The minds of all by nature lean to the side of uncovenanted mercy, as being less humiliating than that plan of forgiveness which the Gospel prescribes. The imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of his righteousness to us, are doctrines at which the natural man revolts: nor is any man brought cordially to acquiesce in them, till he has been made to feel the extent of his own demerit, and his utter incapacity to do any thing which is good.]

Yet, whilst we thus incline to uncovenanted mercy in preference to an atonement, we still expect that mercy.]

2. In a way of self-righteous dependence—

[To renounce all dependence on our own works appears absurd in the extreme: for, if we are not to be saved by our works, what need is there for us to perform them? To set them aside in point of merit, seems to supersede all occasion for the performance of them. Man cannot endure to discard all boasting before God. If he cannot purchase heaven altogether, he will do it in part: and if he be constrained to accept of heaven as a free gift, still he will look to himself for something which shall be a ground of preference in the sight of God, or at least a warrant for him to look to God for the communications of his grace. A free salvation, without money and without price, and apprehended solely by faith, is, to the great mass of Christians, an object of offence, rather than of desire and love.]

3. In a way of self-confident exertion—

[The *doing* of something to merit salvation, is always associated with the doing of it *in our own strength*. The natural man has no conception but that, as he is responsible for all that he does, he must of necessity have a sufficiency for all that he needs to do. The attempting of any thing in the simple exercise of faith, and in expectation of strength

communicated from above, appears to him to be an enthusiastic conceit, unworthy of a sober mind. In short, every part of the Gospel salvation, whether as bringing us to God or fitting us for the enjoyment of him, is the very reverse of what the natural man would either suggest or approve. It cannot even be understood by any who possess not a spiritual discernment, nor ever is received but through the teaching of the Holy Spirit.]

Distant, however, as it is, from human apprehensions, we cannot but acknowledge,

IV. Its suitability to the end proposed—

Does God propose to *humble the sinner* ?

[Nothing effects that work like the Gospel: for in the death of Christ he sees the awful desert of sin, and the impossibility of obtaining mercy without an adequate atonement for it. In the requirement of a life of faith on the Son of God, he sees his own utter incapacity for any thing that is good: and, in the imputation of Christ's righteousness, he is constrained to acknowledge, that even his best works are full of imperfection; and that salvation, from first to last, is, and must be, by grace alone.]

Does he desire to *exalt the Saviour* ?

[The honour of salvation is altogether reserved to Christ, as the Author and Finisher of it: and to him alone, both in heaven and earth, must all the glory of it be ascribed. Not a hope enters the sinner's mind, but through his atoning sacrifice: not a prayer is offered, but through his mediation and intercession: nor to all eternity will a blessing be enjoyed, without being traced to his merit as the procuring cause, and to the influence of his grace as the efficient cause: so entirely will the glory of it all be given to him alone.]

Does he determine to *secure holiness* ?

[Here it is secured, beyond a possibility of failure: nor is it found in any creature under heaven, but in him who receives the Gospel of Christ. Semblances of holiness we may find in self-righteous formalists; but real holiness in none but those who are penetrated with redeeming love. In confirmation of this truth, we appeal to the records of the Church in every age of the world. Even at the present hour, we shrink not from a comparison with all other people under heaven: and we are free to acknowledge, that the professor of religion who soars not in holiness above all the unbelievers upon earth, is unworthy of the name of Christian, and will have no part with Christ in his kingdom and glory.]

Thus we trust that the Gospel, however despised by an ungodly world, is justly entitled to the appellation given it in our text, "The wisdom of God in a mystery."]

SEE, then, from hence,

1. What is the office of a minister—

[It is to proclaim "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." We are to "speak the wisdom of God in a mystery." We are appointed for this very end, even "as stewards of the mysteries of God." We are not to be bringing forth notions out of our own minds; but simply to declare what God has done for the salvation of mankind, and how a guilty world may be reconciled to him. This is the ministry of reconciliation, committed unto us; and in the execution of our office, we beseech you, Be ye reconciled to God — — —]

2. What is the duty of those to whom he ministers—

[Is that which he brings to their ears "a mystery?" It becomes them to receive it into their hearts, with docility, submission, and gratitude. We expect little children to learn from us, without questioning the solidity of our judgment, or the truth of our assertions. That he cannot altogether comprehend the lessons we teach him, is no reason why we do not expect his assent to them. On the contrary, it is by their first receiving our testimony with implicit faith, that they afterwards come to see both the truth and excellence of our instructions. And it is in this way that we also must acquire the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ — — — But we must also submit to the plan proposed by God, and seek remission altogether in the way pointed out by him — — — And finally, we must feel our obligations to the Most High God, who has done such wonders for the salvation of our souls. Whilst on earth, we must, to a certain degree, be penetrated with the zeal and love which we shall feel in heaven; and both here and in eternity "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his."]

MDCCCCXXXVIII.

IGNORANCE OF THE GOSPEL, FATAL.

1 Cor. ii. 8. *Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.*

IT has been supposed, that there is such a transcendent excellence in virtue, that if it were embodied upon earth, it would be universally revered

and honoured. But virtue has been embodied in the person of God's only dear Son; and yet, instead of receiving from man all the homage which might have been expected, it has been treated with all possible indignity, even to the extinction of the person in whom it was found. But in the assumption that all men would honour it, it is taken for granted that all would be able to appreciate its excellence: whereas men, with jaundiced eyes, see every thing with an unfavourable tint upon it; and, consequently err exceedingly in their judgment respecting it. Through this unhappy bias, men "put evil for good, and good for evil; darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter." No wonder, therefore, if their aversion to what is really excellent rises in proportion to its exalted qualities, and their opposition to it be found to correspond with their judgment. We have the authority of an Apostle for saying that this was the real cause of the indignities offered to our incarnate God. Had men been able to form a correct estimate of his character, they could not have treated them as they did: had they fully understood the errand of love on which he came, and the purposes of grace which he was destined to accomplish, they could not have raised their hands against him: it would have been impossible for persons comprehending the great mystery which he came to consummate, so to act: no; "if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory."

In speaking of the ignorance of mankind, and especially their ignorance of true religion, I will endeavour to shew,

I. Its extensive prevalence—

It prevailed to an awful degree in the apostolic age—

[Respecting the way which God had devised for the salvation of a ruined world, the wisest philosophers had not the slightest notion. Nor had the governors of the Jewish people any just conceptions respecting it. Though they had the Scripture in their hands, and the great mystery of godliness

was shadowed forth in all their sacrifices, yet could they not comprehend the purposes of God which were revealed to them. They had the moral law, but knew not its spirituality and extent: they had the ceremonial law, but knew not its typical import: they had the prophecies, but knew not in what way they were to be accomplished. They saw a Messiah promised, but they altogether mistook the nature of the kingdom which he was to establish in the world.]

It prevails also, nearly to the same extent, at this time—

[“The princes of this world,” though born in Christian lands, know, for the most part, but little of Christianity: nay more; the very rulers of the Church itself are far from having that insight into the hidden mysteries of our religion which their general information might give one reason to suppose. As far as a knowledge of the languages in which the Scriptures were written, and a critical skill in interpreting them, and an extensive acquaintance with ecclesiastical history, will qualify men for the sacred office, there may be no cause for complaint: but, if we inquire into men’s knowledge of the “hidden wisdom of God in the great mystery” of redemption, it is lamentable to think how few there are who manifest an acquaintance with it; such an acquaintance, I mean, as has a transforming efficacy on their souls. We see somewhat of the feelings which are generated by a knowledge of this mystery in heaven: we behold, also, the effects produced by it upon the Apostles and martyrs upon earth: but where do we see these feelings excited, and these effects produced, in any considerable degree, in “the princes of this world” amongst ourselves? I mean not to speak disrespectfully of any, or to judge uncharitably of any: but I simply ask, whether, in the public ministrations of men, or in their printed addresses, or in their conversation with each other, there be such a preponderance given to this great mystery as might be expected, or such as would infallibly be given, if its excellence and importance were duly appreciated? Of the secret transactions of men, and the intercourse which may take place between God and their souls, I presume not to speak. I speak only of what is manifested in open act: and of men’s knowledge of this mystery, as tried by that standard, I am constrained to say, it is very partial and confined. Nor need I bring any other proof of my assertion than this, that, wherever this mystery is fully opened, and the different parts of it are inculcated with the energy which its importance demands, the doctrine draws attention as a novelty; and excites odium, as differing from the common standard of the established ministrations. But could this be, if the mystery of the Gospel were so generally

known, and its truths so faithfully promulgated, as some would assert? A taper would attract no notice by day; but it is seen at a great distance at night, by reason of the surrounding darkness: and, for the same reason, even a very slender exhibition of the Gospel, which would have passed unnoticed in the apostolic age, now calls forth adoring gratitude on the part of some, and provokes inveterate hostility on the part of others;—a sure proof, that such exhibitions are not so common amongst us as they ought to be.]

To shew how great an evil this ignorance of the Gospel is, I will proceed to mark,

II. Its injurious tendency—

In the Jews, it led to nothing less than the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory—

[Both Jews and Gentiles concurred in this act. They did not merely refuse to become the disciples of Jesus, but reviled him, and treated him with all imaginable indignities, and at last put him to death, even the accursed death of the cross. And to what but ignorance can we refer it? Can we conceive, that if they had really known Jesus to be “the Lord of Glory,” they would have dared to treat him thus? Methinks, if love to him for his condescension and grace had not restrained them, a fear of his displeasure must have disarmed their malice. It would have been impossible for them to proceed to such extremities, if they had had any just conception of his person and character, his work and office.]

In a similar way it operates on us also—

[It is obvious that men of all ranks and orders live in a neglect of Christ and his salvation, and seek their happiness rather in the things of time and sense — — — But could it be so, if they really knew what a glorious Saviour he is? Could they think so little of all the wonders of his love, if they had any just comprehension of them in their minds? By our treatment of him, we do, in fact, “crucify him afresh, and put him to an open shame.” I ask, Could we do this, if we knew him to be indeed “the Lord of glory,” who had divested himself of all his glory for us, and become a man for us, and died upon the cross for us, and to be carrying on his work in heaven for us, and coming again to make us partakers of his glory for evermore? Bad as human nature is, it could not withstand such a miracle of love as this: it must lay down its weapons of rebellion at the sight of this: at the sight of this it would feel “a constraining influence to live to Him” who has so “loved us and given himself for us.” From our first inquiry, “Who art thou, Lord?” another would instantly succeed, “Lord,

what wilt thou have me to do^a?" and a life of entire devotedness to his service must of necessity ensue.]

Can we wonder then at,

III. Its fatal issue—

It was, to the Jews who continued impenitent, of the most fatal consequence—

[Doubtless their ignorance did in some respects extenuate, but it could by no means excuse, their guilt. The Apostle apologizes for them; saying, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers:" but yet he adds, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out^b," evidently importing, that without repentance, and thorough conversion to God, they must eternally perish. And St. Paul, whilst he speaks of having "obtained mercy, because he did it ignorantly in unbelief," still calls himself "a blasphemer, and injurious, and a persecutor," and "the very chief of sinners," yea, as the greatest miracle of mercy, a monument of mercy to the whole world^c. In the Old Testament, God had declared by the prophets that he would not regard ignorance as any excuse for their iniquities: "They are a people of no understanding: therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour^d." And again, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge^e." And under the New Testament, it is even made a matter of appeal to us: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation^f?" And again, "If judgment begin at the house of God, what shall the end be of them that obey not the Gospel of God? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear^g?" Verily no candid person can doubt what the event was to the unbelieving Jews.]

And will it not have the same issue with respect to us?

[The greater our advantages are above the Jews, the greater is our guilt in neglecting to improve them. It is generally imagined, indeed, that those who commit no sin to lower them in the estimation of their fellow-creatures, are happy when they die: and to intimate a doubt of this would be deemed very uncharitable. But "none, except they be converted, can ever enter into the kingdom of heaven." True indeed it is, that men ignorant of the Gospel, and of the

^a Acts ix. 5, 6. ^b Acts iii. 17, 19. ^c 1 Tim. i. 13, 15, 16.

^d Isai. xxvii. 11. ^e Hos. iv. 6. ^f Heb. ii. 3.

^g 1 Pet. iv. 17, 18.

wonders of love and mercy contained in it, are confident, in their own minds, that they have nothing to fear: and hence they continue in "the broad road that leadeth to destruction," without ever thinking of their impending fate, till they drop into perdition. A fact which a pious writer records, as seen by himself, will well illustrate this. A flock of sheep being frightened on a bridge at the time of a high flood, one of them leaped over the side: all, one after another, followed its example, each supposing that those which had preceded him were safe and happy: but all, to their cost, found out their error when it was too late: for all were immersed in the flood, and perished in the waters. This gives us an exact picture of what is passing all around us. And it is abundantly confirmed in Holy Writ. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man, who had no flagrant sin laid to his charge, supposed himself sure of happiness in death; just as his five surviving brethren did, whilst walking in his steps: but from the depths of hell we hear him crying for a drop of water, to cool his tongue; and entreating, that a messenger might be sent from heaven to warn his brethren of their danger: and, as this request could not be complied with, we have reason to suppose that they also, however confident of their safety, became partakers of his awful doom. And would not many, who are gone before, be glad to send such messengers to us? Yes, I doubt not but that thousands and millions of them would be coming from heaven, if they were allowed to perform that friendly office for our self-deceiving race: for, whatever we may think to the contrary, that very Jesus, whom we slight, will ere long "be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power^h."]

To IMPROVE this subject, I would entreat you to consider,

1. What use you should make of your present opportunities—

[You have "the Lord of glory" set before you, and all the mysteries of redeeming love unfolded to you. Yes, I can appeal to God, that "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." I pray you, then, continue not ignorant of this great mystery; for it is "the wisdom of God, and the power of God" to salvation to all those who receive

^h 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

it. I need not say, in this placeⁱ, how eagerly knowledge is sought, in the hopes of promoting men's future advancement in life: and shall that knowledge be neglected which has so intimate a connexion with your happiness through eternity? I mean not to detract from the importance of human sciences: but I must say, that, when weighed against the knowledge of this mystery, all earthly knowledge is but as the dust upon the balance: for St. Paul, whose judgment in that particular we cannot doubt, "counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." Though you possess ever so small a portion of the one, you may be happy: but without the other you can never be happy, in time or in eternity. I must say, then, to every one amongst you, Seek the knowledge of this mystery: seek to comprehend the height and depth, and length and breadth of the love of Christ contained in it. So shall it be progressively opened to your view, and your souls "be filled with all the fulness of God."]

2. What zeal you should manifest for the glory of your Lord—

[Did those who knew him not, crucify him? and shall not those who know him, honour and exalt his name? Should you forbear to do so, "the very stones would cry out against you." Let an ungodly world complain of you: let them call your zeal enthusiasm, and your love hypocrisy; but be not ye deterred from duty by all the clamour that can be raised against you. You well know what efforts Pilate made to save Jesus from the fury of his persecutors: yet did his entreaties only increase their thirst for his blood. Learn ye of them, and shew the same pertinacity in his righteous cause; yea, rather, let your knowledge operate more forcibly than their ignorant animosity: and as they accounted nothing too much to inflict upon him, account ye nothing too great to do or suffer for the honour of his name.]

3. How well you may be reconciled to sufferings for his sake—

[He has ordained, that all his followers shall have a cross to bear. But shall you account it hard when it is laid upon you? Was he, the Lord of Glory, crucified for you; and will you not bear a cross for him? It is not without reason that he bids you, under such circumstances, to "rejoice and leap for joy:" for "you are partakers of his sufferings," and rendered conformable to him; and your reward in heaven is proportionably augmented by it. Be not, then, either afraid or ashamed of the cross for his sake; but glory in it, and bear it after him

ⁱ The University of Cambridge.

with joy ; and “ rejoice that you are counted worthy to bear it for his sake.” You may suppose that you may disarm the malice of the world by the blamelessness of your conduct. But the more you resemble Christ in your conduct, the more will you be called to suffer for his sake. Open as his character and dispositions were, men knew him not. Nor do they know you^k. Your conduct is as incomprehensible to the ungodly world as Christ’s was. They cannot conceive why you should separate so entirely from their ways, or give yourselves up so entirely to God. If they knew all your views, motives, principles, and habits, they would not so despise you. But, as all that our blessed Lord said or did was perverted, and made an occasion of evil, so must you expect “ all manner of evil to be spoken against you falsely for his sake.” But let it not grieve you to be so treated : for “ the servant cannot expect to be above his Lord.” Be contented to “ suffer with him ” here ; and be assured that you shall “ reign with him ” in glory for ever and ever.]

^k 1 John iii. 1, 2.

MDCCCCXXXIX.

THE GOSPEL A STUPENDOUS MYSTERY.

1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. *It is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.*

THE former part of this passage is generally quoted as relating to the eternal world. But, if the latter part be taken in connexion with it, as it ought to be, the sense is evidently determined to those things which were revealed by the Spirit to the Apostles of Christ. And it is in this sense that the words were originally used in the place from whence they are cited. They are part of a prayer, which the Jews, as soon as they shall begin to embrace the Gospel, will pour out before God in behalf of their afflicted nation ; entreating him to interpose in their behalf, as powerfully as he formerly did when he brought them out of the land of Egypt ; and to make known to them those great and glorious truths of which hitherto they have never had any just

conception^a. To the same purpose the Apostle cites them in our text. He is speaking of the Gospel as "foolishness" indeed to the natural man, but as in reality the most stupendous display of the Divine wisdom; such as had never before been seen, or heard, or thought of, from the foundation of the world^b; and such as, if previously known to those who crucified our Lord, would have effectually deterred them from executing in that respect the eternal counsels of the Deity.

Confining then our views of the passage to what is revealed in the Gospel, we will shew,

I. How infinitely superior the Gospel is to any thing that reason ever devised—

Reason has certainly evinced great powers in relation to things natural and temporal—

[It has penetrated far into the regions of science. It has comprehended within its grasp the whole extent of that field which was laid open to the mind of Solomon; and has arranged according to their nature and properties all parts of the animal and vegetable creation, "from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the wall, together with all the different orders of beasts, and fowl, and fishes of the sea^c." Nay, it has soared beyond this terraqueous globe, even to the starry heavens; and has found out the magnitude and distances and courses of the heavenly bodies, together with the laws by which they move in their respective orbits. It has in these and many other respects carried its researches far beyond the limits which nature appeared to have assigned to it, and has raised man far higher in the scale of creation than by his contracted powers he seemed destined to stand.]

But it has made little progress in relation to things spiritual and eternal—

[Man with all his powers was not able to find out God. Not even the unity of the Godhead was discovered by him; much less were his great and glorious perfections. The wisest philosophers spake on these subjects with much uncertainty and inconsistency. As for any way of reconciliation with God, consistently with the Divine perfections, not so much as a

^a Isai. lxiv. 4. The prayer begins at Isai. lxiii. 15. and continues to the end of the sixty-fourth chapter.

^b ver. 6—8.

^c 1 Kings iv. 33.

thought of it ever entered into the mind of man, till it was revealed to man by the Spirit of God: it was far out of the reach of human reason to declare, how God should be just, and yet the justifier of sinful men. Even a future state of existence was rather guessed at than fully ascertained; and the nature of that state was wholly unknown:—so true is it, in reference to the whole circle of divine knowledge, that “man by wisdom knew not God^d.”

Thus, when we compare the knowledge which we enjoy under the Gospel with the discoveries of uninspired men, we are constrained to say, that they are as wide asunder as light is from darkness, and heaven from hell.]

But, to form a correct estimate of the Gospel, we should see,

II. How far superior it is to any thing that men had a conception of under the Jewish dispensation—

God did reveal himself to Moses: but his views of God were very partial and indistinct: he saw only, as we are told, “his back parts^e.” As far as he, and David, and Isaiah had a clearer insight into the great mystery of redemption than others, they received it rather by special inspiration, than from the notices given of it in the Mosaic law: the Jews as a people had very indistinct notions on the whole subject of religion.

1. Their views of God himself were very dark—

[To them he appeared rather as a Sovereign than as a Father; and as a Sovereign of their own nation only, and not the Father of the whole human race. They beheld him rather in the terrific aspect of his majesty, than in the endearing attribute of mercy.]

2. They knew but little of the way of acceptance with him—

[They had sacrifices, it is true, but such as could give no peace to a wounded conscience. The very necessity of repeating the same sacrifices from year to year, clearly shewed to them, that their past sins were not fully expiated or blotted out. The sacrifices, in this view, were rather “remembrances of sin,” than real expiations of it. For some sins, as murder and adultery, no sacrifice whatever was appointed: and for these therefore there was no well-grounded hope of pardon. All that

^d 1 Cor. i. 21.

^e Exod. xxxiii. 23.

they were assured of, in any case, was, rather an exemption from punishment by the civil magistrate, than an everlasting remission of their sins by God himself: so dark, even in this respect, was the dispensation under which they lived.]

3. The real blessedness of his people could not be duly estimated by them—

[They possessed indeed many privileges above the heathen; but yet they were kept at an awful distance from God. The people at large could not enter into the court of the more privileged orders, the priests and Levites: nor could any but the high-priest alone enter into the most holy place; and he only on one day in the year, and in the way that was particularly prescribed. Their services consisted altogether in burthensome rites and ceremonies, which, instead of calling forth a sublime exercise of spiritual devotion, were “a yoke which none of them were able to bear.” They went in and out before God as servants actuated by fear, and not as children under the influence of love.]

4. Not even the future state of rewards and punishments was clearly known to them—

[Some light indeed was thrown upon the eternal world; but it was faint and glimmering. Little was seen throughout the Mosaic writings but a prospect of temporal rewards and punishments, of an enjoyment of Canaan with much earthly felicity, or of an ejection from it with the attendant miseries of captivity and bondage.]

Thus the whole of the Jewish state was at best only as an intermediate state between the darkness of heathenism and the light of the Gospel: it was as the early dawn to usher in the brighter day.]

To elucidate the infinite superiority of the Gospel, we must proceed to shew,

III. How full and rich a manifestation of it we enjoy—

“The darkness is now passed, and the true light now shineth^f;”—

1. God himself is now fully revealed to us—

[We see not only his unity, but his subsistence in Three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; all in glory equal, and in majesty co-eternal. All his perfections also have been made, as it were, to shine both in their separate, and united, splendour before our eyes;—justice harmonizing with mercy, and righteousness combining with truth, in the salvation of fallen man:

^f 2 John, ver. 8.

yea, justice glorified in the way of mercy, and mercy in the way of justice, and truth and righteousness in all. Yes verily, "the whole glory of the Godhead now shines before us in the face of Jesus Christ^c."

2. The mysterious plan of redemption also is now fully opened—

[We are introduced, if we may so speak, to the eternal counsels of the Deity, wherein the Father gave to his Son a people to be redeemed, and the Son undertook to lay down his life for them. In the fulness of time we behold the eternal Son of God laying aside that glory which he had with the Father before the worlds were made; and taking upon him our nature, on purpose that in the nature which had sinned he might suffer the curse that was due to sin. We behold him fulfilling the perfect law of God for us, that we may have his perfect righteousness imputed to us, and at the same time expiating our guilt by his own sufferings on the cross. We see him further rising from the dead, and ascending up to heaven, to carry on there the work he had begun on earth; to be the continual Intercessor for his people, and, as their living Head, to supply them with all that their necessities require. And, finally, we behold him coming again to judge the world, and to assign to his friends, and to his enemies, the portion prepared for them; and then, having completed the whole work of redemption to the uttermost, "surrendering up the kingdom into the Father's hands, that God may be all in all."

How amazing is all this! how infinitely beyond all that human eye ever saw, or ear heard, or heart conceived!]

3. The felicity of God's people is now also plainly declared—

["Perfect peace" is now to be enjoyed by all who believe in Christ. No doubt rests upon the mind respecting the fulness and sufficiency of his atonement: it is known to be a sufficient "propitiation for the sins of the whole world." Now every believer has free access into the holiest of all, to behold God himself upon his mercy-seat, and to present before him his sacrifices of prayer and praise. Every saint now regards God as his Father, and with a filial confidence goes in and out before him, assured that every thing both in heaven and earth shall be ordered with an immediate view to his good, as much as if there were not another creature in the universe. And lastly, he looks up to the more immediate residence of Jehovah, assured that a crown and a kingdom are prepared for him, even a participation of the Redeemer's glory, and an everlasting fruition of God himself.

Say, Did ever any child of man, even among the Jews, foresee such things as these? Did even the highest archangel ever form any adequate conception of them, before they were revealed to the Christian Church? No: they were hid from angels, as well as men^h; and the angels are made wiser by the revelation of them to the Churchⁱ. But to *us* they are now revealed: they are revealed *to us* in the written word; and they are revealed *in us* by the mighty power of the Spirit taking the veil from our hearts, and giving to us a spiritual discernment^k: and we are authorized to declare, that the most ignorant of true believers at this day is greater than all the prophets, not excepting the Baptist himself, who personally knew Christ, and pointed him out as "the Lamb of God who should take away the sins of the world^l."

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How inexcusable are they who inquire not into these things!

[Has God in his infinite mercy revealed such things to us, and shall we pay no attention to them? Shall we treat them as if they were no other than "a cunningly-devised fable?" Shall "the angels in heaven be desiring to look into them^m," and we be unconcerned about them? O, brethren, what account shall we give of ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, if, when he says to us, "Search the Scriptures, for they testify of me," we prefer every other book before them, and either neglect the Bible altogether, or read it only as a formal exercise? Surely our "study should be in it day and night," and it should be "sweeter to us than honey, or the honey-comb."]

2. How blind must we be, if we see no glory in them!

[What! see nothing wonderful in an incarnate God! Nothing wonderful in God dying in the place of his own rebellious creatures! Nothing wonderful in our being brought by these means into union and communion with God, and an everlasting participation of his glory in the world to come! If these things be not wonderful, tell me any thing that is. You would be filled with utter astonishment, if a fellow-creature were to tell you some of the phenomena of nature; and are you not when God tells you all the wonders of his grace? If these things produce no admiring and adoring

^h This is particularly marked in the passage as it stands in Isaiah; "None, O God, *besides thee*." Isai. lxiv. 4.

ⁱ Eph. iii. 9, 10.

^k 1 Cor. ii. 12, 14.

^l Matt. xi. 11.

^m 1 Pet. i. 12.

thoughts in your hearts, know assuredly that the God of this world hath blinded your eyes, and that "you are in darkness even until now." Were you of the happy number of the Lord's people, it would have "been given you to behold the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven:" but "if you see them not, it is because ye are not of God."]

3. How ungrateful are they who do not endeavour to walk worthy of them!

[These things are revealed, not as matters of speculation, but as means of happiness, and as incentives to holiness of life. Do but think what manner of persons ye ought to be in all holy conversation and godliness; *ye*, I say, for whom such things have been done, and to whom they have been revealed! But it will be well for you to attend to that expression in our text, that "God hath prepared these things for *them that love him*." True, in the first instance it is for his enemies: but they do not remain his enemies; on the contrary, they "love him," and serve him, and "wait for him": and verily, if, after you have been enlightened by the Spirit of God, and been enabled to behold all these wonders of love and mercy, you do not devote yourselves wholly to the Lord, you shew that you have no part or lot in this matter. You may have believed, like Simon Magus; but like Simon Magus you shall perish: for know assuredly, that, "if ye be Christ's, ye will crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, and will glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are his^o."]

ⁿ Compare the passage as it stands in Isaiah, with the same as cited by Paul.

^o If this be the subject of a *Mission Sermon*, the duty of diffusing over the face of the whole earth these glorious truths may here be pressed to great advantage.

MDCCCCXL.

THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD.

1 Cor. ii. 10. *The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

IN the verse immediately preceding our text, which is a citation from the Prophet Isaiah, there is a remarkable difference between the words, as uttered by the Prophet, and as cited by the Apostle. The Apostle quotes only so much as was sufficient to

shew that the great mystery of redemption was never conceived *by man* before it was revealed to us by God. But the prophet excludes all the bright intelligences of heaven, no less than men ; and intimates that none but *God* was privy to the Divine counsels : “ Neither hath eye seen, O God, *besides thee*, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for him^a.” This omission we should not have particularly noticed, if the Apostle had not, by his subsequent observations, drawn our attention to it more particularly, by shewing, that though there was no *finite* intelligence privy to these counsels, there was ONE, who, though God, was in some respects to be distinguished from Him, whose counsels they were, and who did “ search,” and behold with perfect accuracy, the very utmost depths of that mystery, and who also had revealed them to the Apostle :—“ God,” says the Apostle, “ hath revealed them to us by his Spirit : for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him ? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.” Now, throughout this whole passage, there is repeated mention made *of God*, as the source and fountain from whence this mysterious plan emanated ; and *of the Spirit of God*, as a distinct Agent discovering these depths to us. From hence we have an insight into the doctrine of the Trinity of persons in the Godhead ; a doctrine obscurely intimated in the words of the prophet, but plainly declared in the Apostle’s fuller explanation of them. The personality of the Holy Spirit, and his divinity, are here repeatedly asserted : and a beautiful light is thrown upon those words of the prophet ; “ No eye hath seen, O God, *besides thee* :” for though no *created* being hath seen, the Holy Ghost hath : for “ the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

^a Isai. lxiv. 4.

In these words we are led to contemplate *the province of the Holy Spirit in relation to the great mystery of redemption*; to contemplate it, I say,

I. As exercised by him in reference to God—

He “searcheth the deep things of God:” he searcheth,

1. The eternal purposes of his grace—

[From all eternity did God determine to suffer the fall of man, and to provide means for his recovery. The means ordained by him were, the incarnation and death of his only dear Son, whom he would send into the world to be a propitiation for sin, and to work out a righteousness whereby the believing penitent might be justified. Every particular relative to this mysterious plan was foreseen and fore-ordained. The person of whom the Son of God should take our flesh; the time at which he should come into the world; the various incidents of his life; the minutest circumstances of his death; the agents that should effect it, and the precise part which every one of them should bear in effecting it, whether Judas in betraying him, or Pilate in condemning, or the Romans in crucifying, or Joseph and Nicodemus in burying him: every thing also relating to his resurrection and ascension, and the sending of his Holy Spirit, and the consequent establishment of his kingdom in the world; all was ordained of God the Father: but all was searched out by God the Holy Ghost. He had the same perfect knowledge of it as the Father himself; and not the smallest incident that occurred in any part of it was hid from his all-seeing eye. “No eye saw it, *besides his*.” but he saw it in all its parts, and in all its bearings: not the slightest thing connected with it was hid from him.]

2. His particular dealings with every individual of mankind—

[The salvation of all was to be of grace, from beginning to end. Yet was man to be dealt with as a rational and responsible being; every man being left to the freest exercise of his own will, yet subject to an agency within, which, in all that should be saved, should be effectual for the overcoming of all the evil propensities of his nature. It was not ordained that all should ultimately be saved: but it was ordained, that those who were saved should have nothing to boast of; and that those who perished should have nothing to complain of: the saved should owe their salvation to him alone; the lost should owe their condemnation wholly to themselves. But who could fathom such depths as these? Who could tell how God should ordain all, and yet not interfere with the free

agency of any; and how he should reserve to himself the praise from all that were saved, and leave all the blame of condemnation to rest on those who should bring that doom upon themselves? But the Spirit of God searched out all these unfathomable depths. He saw how the whole should be carried into effect, in every individual of the human race: at what time, in what manner, and by what means, the elect should be converted, preserved, perfected; and, at the same time, how the rest should be left to reject the mercies offered them, and to perish under an accumulated weight of misery. If St. Paul, in relation to the calling of the Gentiles and the restoration of the Jews, exclaimed, "O the depths!" much more must we, in the contemplation of such mysterious works as these.]

3. The glorious issue of all his dispensations--

[The result of all will be the glory of God, both "in them that are saved, and in them that perish." "Though Israel be not gathered, yet will He be glorious^b." God declared that he would get himself glory on Pharaoh and all his hosts^c: and, on his destruction of them all, Moses said, "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy^d." In the judgments also that were executed on Nadab and Abihu, God was "glorified^e." In like manner, even in the torments of the damned, will God be glorified: for all who behold the infliction of his wrath will be constrained to say, "Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments^f." It is indeed a tremendous thought, and to our weak apprehensions it appears incredible, that God should be glorified in the eternal condemnation of any of his creatures. But so it will be: and at the last day, when Jesus "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe^g," will the objects of his wrath be confounded before him, and never have one word to utter in arrest of his judgments^h. Now all this the Holy Spirit saw from the beginning. He saw, that if mercy was glorified in the salvation of some, justice would be glorified in the condemnation of others: and that the whole issue of this stupendous mystery would be worthy of the Most High God; of the Father, who had planned it; of the Son, who had executed it; and of the Spirit, who had carried it into full effect.]

But as the Holy Spirit, in the exercise of this office, has respect to us, it will be proper for us to contemplate it,

^b Isai. xlix. 5. ^c Exod. xiv. 17.

^d Exod. xv. 6.

^e Lev. x. 2.

^f Rev. xvi. 5—7, and xix. 2. ^g 2 Thess. i. 10.

^h Matt. xxii. 12.

II. As exercised by him in reference to us—

“He searcheth *all things*,” as the Apostle intimates, *on purpose to reveal them to us*. He searcheth them,

1. As a Teacher, to reveal them *to us*—

[It is the Holy Spirit who revealed this hidden mystery to prophets firstⁱ, and then to the Apostles of our Lord^k: and the whole of the written word was penned by inspiration from him — — — But in the sacred volume there is much that is beyond our comprehension: indeed, if it were all level with our capacity, we should have reason to doubt whether it were really from God; seeing that it would be totally unlike to his other works of creation and providence, in which there is confessedly much that no human being can explain. But the Spirit having searched the deep things of God, is perfectly acquainted with them all, and has revealed to us nothing but what he knows to be true. We, therefore, must receive by faith all that he has declared. Our only concern is, to know what the Holy Spirit has spoken in his word: and *that* once ascertained, we must receive it with childlike simplicity; saying, ‘What I know not now, I shall know hereafter.’ That we cannot comprehend it, should be no objection to us: for, if God had explained the whole ever so clearly, there must be many things which we could not comprehend. Let a philosopher declare to an uninstructed peasant some of the more hidden depths of astronomy, could the peasant comprehend them? or could the philosopher, by all the clearest demonstrations, enable him to comprehend them? And if such a distance exist between *men*, may we not well suppose that an infinitely greater distance will be found between *God* and man? I say, it is our wisdom to submit our understandings to the word of God: and there is no juster lesson afforded us in all the Scriptures, than that of the Apostle, “If any man will be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise^l.”]

2. As an Instructor, to reveal them *in us*—

[To Him we are directed to look for that spiritual discernment, whereby alone we can comprehend the truths of God^m. The Apostles themselves, after they had heard our Lord’s instructions for nearly four years, were unable to understand the Scriptures, till “he opened their understandings to understand themⁿ.” So it is with us: we must have a “spirit of wisdom and revelation given to us,” before we can attain “the

ⁱ 2 Pet. i. 21.

^m ver. 11.

^k John xvi. 13, 14.

ⁿ Luke xxiv. 45.

^l 1 Cor. iii. 18.

knowledge of Christ^o;" and must "all be taught of God^p," before we can "know the things that have been freely given to us of God^q." Let me then recommend, that, whenever you open the inspired volume, you lift up your hearts to him, and say, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

Shall this be thought unnecessary? Shall it be supposed, that, because we have the words and sentences plainly written, we can necessarily discern the mind of God in them? Were this the case, every student of the Scriptures would, in all their principal and fundamental points at least, have a clear understanding of them. But experience proves, that, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, we may have an accurate knowledge of the letter, and yet have no conception of the spirit of them. They are a sealed book to us at this time, as they were to those of former days. Like a dial, which has the figures accurately marked, and the gnomon rightly fixed; but yet you look at it in vain, till the light of the sun shine upon it: so in vain do you read or study the Holy Scriptures, till a light shine upon them from above, or till God "shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^r."

3. As a Governor, to bring us into subjection to them—

[If the Spirit of God have searched out for us the deep things of God, and have made them known to us, it is not that we should speculate upon them, but that we should, as far as possible, be conformed to them. We must be as ready to obey him in what he commands, as to believe him in what he reveals. We must complain of nothing as an hard saying; but must give up ourselves as willing servants to fulfil his will, or rather must be like metal that is ready to be poured into the mould which God has prepared for us. This is the very idea suggested by the Apostle Paul, when he says of all true Christians, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you:" his expression rather is, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, into which, as into a mould, ye were delivered^s." If this be not attained, the manifestation of God's will in the written word will be of no use: indeed, it will only occasion our heavier condemnation.

If any reply, that there are commands which appear unreasonable, and that we cannot be required to obey them; I answer, We are not to sit in judgment upon God, and to determine whether his commands be reasonable or not. We expect to

^o Eph. i. 17, 18,

^p John vi. 45.

^q ver. 12.

^r 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^s Rom. vi. 17. See the Greek.

be obeyed by our children and our servants, though they do not know all the objects we have in view when we issue our commands. We expect them to give us credit for ordering only what is wise and good; and to take for granted, rather than deliberate upon, the wisdom of our commands. And what we expect of others, we may well be required to render unto him.]

4. As a Witness, to testify of our conformity to them—

[It is said of him, that “He searcheth all things:” and if he search “the deep things of God,” does he not also search the deep things that are in *our hearts*? Yes, “He searcheth the heart and trieth the reins,” and discerneth the inmost thoughts and intents of our hearts. “I know,” says he, “the things that come into your minds, every one of them.” Yes, “He weigheth the spirits,” and ascertaineth precisely the measure of good and evil that there is in the heart of every one amongst us. We must not suppose that he has fully executed his office when he has revealed to us the deep things of God. No: he searches how we receive them; how we improve them; how we answer the end of God in them. And this he does with a view to a future judgment, that we may all “receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it be good or evil.” Let us, then, bear this in mind: let us remember, that he is conversant with every inclination, every affection, every appetite of our souls. The darkness is no darkness with him, but the night is as clear as the day: and as his testimony respecting God is true, so will his testimony respecting us be true. Attend then to the way in which every day and every hour is spent. Mark in what frame your mind is, in all your public or private addresses to the Most High. Call yourselves to a severe account respecting every duty and every defect. After all, you will never weigh yourselves so accurately as he weighs you: and “if your heart condemn you, God is greater than your hearts, and knoweth all things: but if your heart condemn you not, then have you confidence towards God^t.”]

^t 1 John iii. 20, 21.

MDCCCXLI.

INFLUENCES OF THE SPIRIT.

1 Cor. ii. 12, 13. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

NO man was ever better qualified to please men with the charms of oratory than the Apostle Paul: for, in point of talent, few perhaps have ever exceeded him; and, in point of knowledge, no uninspired man ever came near him. In the great subject of his ministrations there is a sublimity, in comparison of which all other subjects are but as a star before the meridian sun. Yet, in setting forth that subject, he was particularly careful to “use all plainness of speech,” lest he should obscure, rather than illustrate, its excellency by any vain attempts to embellish and adorn it. This he repeatedly mentions, as the stated rule prescribed to him by God, and followed by him. “Christ,” says he, “sent me to preach the Gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect^a.” In conformity with this commission, he says, “I came to you not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring the testimony of God:” and again, “My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom:” and so also in the words of my text, “Which things we speak, not with words which man’s wisdom teacheth^b.” As, in receiving the Gospel, he had been taught it by the Spirit of God; so in communicating the knowledge of it to others, he would make use of no other language than that which the Spirit himself had provided.

The declarations of the Apostle in my text will lead me to shew,

I. Whence a minister must receive his choicest qualifications—

Of course, if he would instruct others, he himself must be instructed in “the things which are freely given to us of God”—

[God has given us salvation in the Son of his love — — — He has also made known to us this salvation in the fullest manner — — — And this is the subject which every servant of his has it in commission to unfold to a benighted world — — —]

^a 1 Cor. i. 17.

^b ver. 1, 4, 13.

But how is he himself to obtain the knowledge of it?—

[He must “receive it, not from the spirit of the world, but from the Spirit of God.” It is itself altogether foreign to all that the world either cultivates or admires. It is not within the power of human intellect to comprehend it; or of human investigation to search it out; or of human wisdom to impart the knowledge of it. The Spirit of the living God alone can convey it to the mind.

If it be asked, How are we to account for this? I will confess, that the statement, by which persons very generally endeavour to account for it, I greatly disapprove. We are told in the words following my text, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned^c.” Hence some imagine that a *distinct sense* must be given to us, without which we can no more discern the truths of the Gospel, than a man can discern the objects of sight, or smell, or taste, whilst he has not the organs proper for the perception of them. But, were this the case, a man would be no more blameable for his ignorance of divine things, than a man who was born deaf or blind would be for not perceiving objects by his eyes or ears. A juster view of the case, I apprehend, is this. The word is that seal which the Spirit of God uses for the stamping of the Divine image upon man; and the heart of man is the wax, which is ordained of God to receive the impression. But the wax is hardened by sin; so hardened, that not even the word of God himself can make any impression on it. Hence it resists the word, even as stone or iron would the action of a seal upon it. Thus is man’s ignorance to be ascribed, not less to the hardness, than to the blindness of his heart^d. Nor is this all. Man does not only withstand the word, as stone or iron would the impression of a seal, but as a spring would resist it. In a spring there is a re-action, proportioned to the force which acts upon it: and this is the kind of resistance which the heart of man gives to the word of God. Man’s heart rises in opposition to the word, and with all its power repels it. The Jew rejects it as “a stumbling-block;” and the Greek despises it as “foolishness.” And hence it is, that no power but that of the Spirit of God can overcome the obstinacy of man’s resistance to the word.

And how does the Spirit of God produce this effect? It operates as fire on the wax. Our Lord has said, that he will “baptize us with the Holy Ghost and with fire;” that is, with

^c ver. 14.

^d Eph. iv. 18, *πῶρωσιν*. See the marginal version.

the Holy Ghost, who shall operate as fire. And when that divine Agent applies the word to the soul, he humbles the soul, and softens it, and renders it susceptible of that very impression which the word is intended to make upon it. And this is the very account which St. Paul himself gives of the process, when he says, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you;" or, as it should rather have been translated, "Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, into which (as into a mould) ye were delivered^e."

The dependence of a minister on the Spirit of God for the instruction of his own mind shews,

II. How alone his efforts can be made effectual for the salvation of his hearers—

It is not by the power of human eloquence that he must prevail—

[Human eloquence is good in its place: but it can add nothing to the truth of God. On the contrary, it rather takes from the power of God's word, than adds any thing to it; just as any efforts of man to augment by paint the brilliancy of a diamond, would only, in the issue, obscure its lustre. There is a majesty in the word of God, which we may enervate, but can never augment.]

It is by the simple statement of the Gospel, as revealed in the sacred records—

[The words of Scripture have a power which no words of man can attain. And, though it is not necessary that they should be used on every occasion, they must always be the foundation of what we assert, and must always be referred to in confirmation of it. St. Paul "compared spiritual things with spiritual:" he had to unfold spiritual truths; and he referred to what the Spirit of God had previously revealed, as containing the substance of all that he promulgated. Did he set forth Jesus as the Messiah? He referred to the prophecies which had announced his advent, and were fulfilled in him. Did he expatiate upon the work and offices of Christ? He referred to those typical institutions which had been appointed to shadow them forth. Thus, in like manner, must we do; particularly pointing out *the spiritual provisions of the Gospel* as suited to *the spiritual necessities of man*. It is this kind of statement which alone succeeds to any great extent. God might, if he pleased, render more partial statements effectual; and on some occasions he does: but for the most

^e εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδασχῆς. Rom. vi. 17.

part, *it is by an exhibition of the Gospel AS A REMEDY, that he chiefly works for the salvation of man.* The state of man, as fallen, must be fully opened: his guilt and danger and helplessness must be set forth with all fidelity: then must the Saviour be proclaimed, as making a full atonement for our sins, as bringing in for us an everlasting righteousness, and as supplying out of his own fulness all that our utmost necessities can require. This is the doctrine to which the Holy Ghost bears testimony, and which he uses as a seal, to stamp the divine image on our souls. A striking instance of this may be seen when Peter opened this Gospel to the Jews^f; and again, when he also first opened it to the Gentiles. On the latter occasion, when he had said, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," it is particularly noted, "*When Peter spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them that heard the word*^g." And we also can bear testimony, that he does yet set his seal to these blessed truths, and make use of them for the consolation and salvation of those who hear them.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. How to judge of our knowledge of divine things—

[A *head-knowledge* of them may be obtained from books: but a *heart-knowledge*, if I may so speak, can be acquired only by the teaching of the Holy Spirit. We should carefully inquire, therefore, *of what kind* our knowledge is. If it be such as *man* can impart, it is not that which will prove of saving benefit to our souls. But it may be asked, 'If the subject matter be the same, how shall I distinguish between human teaching and divine?' I answer, The distinction can be known only by experience. Suppose a person who had constantly seen the sun, but never felt its beams, were told, that a man exposed to the action of its rays had a totally different perception of the sun from any which a mere sight of it would produce: he could not enter fully into the distinction, as the person could, who felt the genial warmth of the sun: and so a person, unacquainted with the operations of the Spirit upon the soul would have a very inadequate idea of the experience of one who felt them, even though we should labour ever so much to make him comprehend it. But yet, methinks, you will not be altogether at a loss to comprehend the distinction, if I say, that the truths of the Gospel, when received from man only, abide in the mind much in the same way as any speculative subject does; whereas, when applied to the soul by the Spirit of God, they produce a feeling

^f Acts ii. 36, 37.

^g Acts x. 43, 44.

corresponding with the truths themselves; that is, a feeling of humiliation, or confidence, or joy, as the subject itself may require. Perhaps we may understand the matter yet more clearly, if we refer to the illustration before used, of a seal and the wax: the same seal is applied to both; but the one, by reason of an *invisible action of heat* upon it, receives an impression; whilst the other, by reason of its obduracy, remains unimpressed. Inquire then, I pray you, whether divine truth operate on your minds, to the production of penitential sorrow, of holy joy, of unreserved obedience. It is from its effects, in assimilating the soul to the Divine image, that you must judge of the source from whence your knowledge flows. If it be *from* God, you may rest assured that it will lead you *to* God.]

2. How we may grow in all that is good—

[If we can learn only from the Spirit of God, we must still continue to seek his heavenly teaching. Even after our eyes have been opened by the Spirit of God, the Scriptures will still be to us as a sealed book, unless He shine upon it from on high, and shine into our hearts also, to give us the knowledge of it^h. Remember, then, to seek, even to your latest hour, instruction from Him. If at any time you take up the Scriptures, to read them, forget not to pray, with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." So also, when you come to hear the word, look up to the Holy Spirit for his gracious influence upon your soul: for if it come not home to you "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," it will be only "as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again:" but if you rely simply upon him, and "receive it with meekness" as little children, you shall find it "mighty, through Him, to the pulling down of every obstruction," and shall experience its sufficiency to sanctify and save the soul.]

^h 2 Cor. iv. 6.

MDCCCCXLII.

THE NATURAL MAN'S IGNORANCE OF DIVINE THINGS.

1 Cor. ii. 14. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

CHRISTIANITY, as far as relates to its provisions, is founded on the necessities of man: there is a perfect correspondence between the want and the

supply : whichever of the two is contemplated, we of necessity behold, or at least may behold, the other. Men, it is true, are not very willing to acknowledge their necessities ; and hence they think lightly of the blessings of the Gospel salvation : and many, who are willing to confess the depravation of their will and their affections through the fall of our first parents, are very averse to admit the loss they have sustained in their intellectual powers. But it is certain, that the mind of man is no longer what it was before the introduction of sin into the world : it can no longer discern the glory and excellency of Jehovah, or the mysteries of his spiritual kingdom. This is expressly declared in the words before us ; which it is our intention,

I. To explain—

That we may have a just view of them, we will distinctly shew,

1. Whom we are to understand by “ the natural man ”—

[The term which we translate “ natural,” is differently translated in different places ; and the sense must always be determined by the context. Now the whole context shews, that the person here spoken of is man in his natural state, untaught, and unassisted by the Spirit of God. From the middle of the preceding chapter, two descriptions of persons are mentioned ; one, wise in respect of earthly knowledge, but spiritually blind, and, in consequence of that blindness, pouring contempt upon the Gospel : the other, as spiritually enlightened, and, in consequence of that illumination, accounting the Gospel the richest display of God’s wisdom and power. The former the Apostle denominates the “ wise, the scribe, the disputer of this world,” and comprehends among them “ the princes of this world : ” these, in our text, he calls “ the natural man,” that is, man conversant with worldly knowledge, but uninstructed by the Spirit of God.]

2. What are those things which he can neither receive nor know—

[These are “ the things of the Spirit,” or, the great mysteries which are revealed to us in the Gospel. And when it is said, that the natural man cannot know them, we are not to understand merely that these mysteries are not discoverable by the light of reason, so as to supersede the necessity of any

revelation; but that, however revealed to us externally by God, they cannot be inwardly comprehended, without a special discovery of them to the soul by the influence of the Holy Spirit. As far as they are capable of being judged of by reason, or are mere matters of science, any man may, by the application of his own natural powers, understand them: but, as far as they are objects of faith, and matters of experience, no man can understand them, unless he be taught of God. Theoretically, he may maintain the whole system of the fall and the recovery; but, practically, he cannot realize in his soul the truths which he maintains: the humiliation which his depravity calls for, he cannot feel; nor the gratitude, which the wonders of redemption so imperiously demand. On the contrary, the whole system, however *as a theory* it may be approved, *as a practical and influential principle in the soul* is accounted "foolishness."]

3. Whence this incapacity arises—

[It is well accounted for in the words before us: "He cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned." We are not to understand by this, that the spiritual man is endued with any new faculty, which the natural man does not possess; for then the natural man would be rather to be pitied for a defect which was unavoidable, than to be blamed for a weakness to which he himself was accessory: we are rather to understand, that the natural man does not make a right use of the faculties which he already possesses, but, through the corruption of his own heart, renders them unfit for the use for which they were originally designed. Perhaps we may attain some insight into this matter by means of an easy and familiar illustration. Many by nature are very indistinct in their organs of vision; and art has enabled them to supply the defect. From the formation and structure of their eye, the objects which they behold do not fall upon the retina that should reflect them, but either fall short of it, or go beyond it: but, by interposing a proper medium, the object is brought to such a focus as the eye requires; and is then clearly discerned. Now we may suppose our natural pride, and unbelief, and sensuality, to have rendered our spiritual discernment so indistinct, that nothing is seen aright; but objects, especially spiritual objects, are dim and distorted: but humility, and contrition, and faith being given by God as a new medium through which they shall be seen, the objects are made, so to speak, to fall upon the heart, and are discerned by the heart in all their true colours and dimensions. We do not propose this as a *perfect* illustration; for nothing in nature will perfectly represent the mysteries of grace: but it may serve perhaps to convey some faint idea of our natural incapacity to know and to receive the things of the Spirit; and may shew us what we want in order to a spiritual

discernment. It is the Spirit of God alone that can supply us with those qualities of mind which will rectify the defects of our visual organs: but when he does supply them, then, in proportion as they are communicated, will be the clearness of our sight. We again say, that we do not bring this as a *perfect* illustration, and much less as a *proof*, of the truth we are considering: but we apprehend, that it is such an illustration as the word of God sanctions. Our blessed Lord tells us, that, “if our eye be evil, the body will be dark; but that, if our eye be single, our whole body will be full of light:” and St. Paul says, that “by reason of use our senses are exercised to discern both good and evil^a,” by which two passages we learn, that the rectification of our visual organs, and the due application of them to their proper objects, are the appointed means of communicating to us a spiritual discernment.]

This truth, we now proceed,

II. To confirm—

The natural man, under all circumstances, is blind to the things of God—

It was so in our Lord’s day—

[Never was there any light comparable to that which was diffused by the Sun of Righteousness: yet the darkness comprehended it not. Our Lord came to his own, and his own received him not^b. The very people who, from their acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, and their opportunities of knowing the character of our blessed Lord, and the proofs of his divine mission, had the best means of ascertaining the truth of his Messiahship, could see “no beauty or comeliness in him for which he was to be desired^c.” The great mass of the Jewish people accounted him an impostor: and when his own Disciple, Peter, confessed him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Lord said to him, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven^d.” Whence it is evident, that none can truly receive Christ in all his characters and offices, unless a spiritual discernment be given unto them by the Spirit of God. Clear as our Lord’s discourses were, they were not understood fully even by the Disciples themselves. “To them indeed it was given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” more clearly than to others; but even they could not enter fully into the nature of his kingdom, no, not after he had risen from the dead, till “he opened their understandings to understand the Scriptures^e.”]

^a Heb. v. 14.

^b John i. 5, 10, 11.

^c Isai. liii. 2.

^d Matt. xvi. 17.

^e Luke xxiv. 45.

It was so under the ministry of the Apostles—

[Paul himself, so far from being convinced by the wonders of the day of Pentecost, was the most determined enemy of the Christian Church, till Christ himself arrested him in his mad career, and revealed himself to him by an immediate vision, and a special revelation from heaven. In like manner the ministry of Paul was as offensive to some, as it was delightful and instructive to others. Those "whose hearts the Lord opened," as he did Lydia's, "to attend to the things spoken by Paul," received the word with all gladness; but the great majority of his hearers rejected it with abhorrence. The very same words spoken before Festus and Agrippa, made one to cry out, "Paul, thou art beside thyself:" and the other to say, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."]

And thus it is also at this day—

[The work of conversion does not go forward among "the wise, the mighty, the noble:" on the contrary, the Gospel is very generally esteemed as "foolishness" among them. We still find occasion for the same acknowledgment as our Lord himself made: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight^f." To this source we must trace all the difference that we still observe amongst the hearers of the Gospel: "the Spirit of God worketh all in all; and divideth to every man severally as he will^g." If we know Christ, it is because "he hath given us an understanding that we might know him^h," and "an unction of the Holy One," whereby our faculties were enabled to apprehend himⁱ: and, if we have come to Christ, it is because "we have heard and learned of the Father^k."]

Humiliating, no doubt, this declaration is: nevertheless it is one which we shall do well,

III. To improve—

We may learn from it—

1. How to appreciate divine knowledge—

[Valuable as human knowledge is, it bears no comparison with that which is divine. So superior is "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord," that St. Paul accounted all things but as dross "and dung in comparison of it." It is more excellent in its nature, more exalted in its origin, and more beneficial in its use. Into the mystery of

^f Matt. xi. 25, 26. ^g 1 Cor. xii. 6, 11. ^h 1 John v. 20.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 20, 27. ^k John vi. 45.

redemption the very "angels themselves desire to look." To understand it, we must be taught, not of man, but of God; and, when we have received it aright, it will renew and sanctify us after the Divine image. Let it then be sought by us, not exclusively indeed, but supremely. Let us not be satisfied with any knowledge which the natural man can attain: but let us seek that which shall carry its own evidence along with it as divine, by its renewing, sanctifying, and comforting influence upon the soul.]

2. How to seek it—

[Nothing is to be attained without diligence: but it is not by study only that the knowledge of divine things is to be acquired: we must "cry after knowledge," at the same time that we "search for it as for hid treasures." It is "the Lord alone who giveth wisdom;" and therefore we must seek it from him by earnest prayer. We must beg him "to give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him," that the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may see "the deep things of God." He first "commanded light to shine out of darkness" in the material world; and a similar process must take place in our minds through the operation of his word and Spirit. We must be "taught of God, as all his children are:" and then only shall we behold "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, when he shines into our hearts to give it us¹." Our studies therefore must all be accompanied with prayer, and we must never take up the Holy Scriptures without crying, like David, "Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."]

3. How to employ it—

[Has God in his unbounded mercy opened our eyes, and enabled us to see what the natural man is not able to receive? Surely we should endeavour to employ that light in the way that shall most conduce to his glory. We should make use of it as the means of searching out his glorious perfections, and of discovering the heights and depths of his unsearchable love. We should also employ it for the rectifying of all our own views, and spirit, and conduct: and, finally, for the diffusing, to the utmost of our power, the knowledge of him throughout the world. As it was said to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren;" so is it said to us, "Freely ye have received, freely give." No one gift is bestowed on us for ourselves alone, but for the good of others: and knowledge in particular is a talent entrusted to us for the benefit

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

of all around us: "it is a light that is to be set on a candlestick, and not to be hid under a bushel." If then, through the distinguishing grace of God, we have been called to the knowledge of the truth, it becomes us to "shine as lights in the world," and so to "hold forth the word of life," that others may be "guided into the way of peace."]

MDCCCCXLIII.

ADVANTAGES OF THE SPIRITUAL MAN.

1 Cor. ii. 15, 16. *He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

TO claim, in the behalf of any person, a pre-eminence and distinction which does not belong to him, is invidious and unwise; but to prefer such a claim in behalf of persons on account of some peculiarity in their religious sentiments or feelings, would be an act of palpable impiety. In proclaiming, therefore, the advantages of a spiritual man above those who are only carnal, I would proceed with extreme caution, lest I should appear to arrogate in his behalf what does not truly and properly belong to him. Yet we must not dissemble, that the Scriptures do paint in very bright colours the privileges of the true Christian; and that he is represented as a "child of light," whilst others are "children of darkness;" yea, and as "a child of God" too, whilst others are declared to be "the children of the wicked one."

It is evident that there is in the passage before us a comparison drawn between the natural and the spiritual man. The natural man is he who has nothing but what he possesses by nature, or has acquired by his natural powers: the spiritual man is one who has been enlightened and renewed by the Spirit of God. The former, in all his views, desires, and pursuits, is circumscribed by the things of time and sense: the latter soars to spiritual things, and lives, as it were, in a sublimer atmosphere, the element of heaven.

Of these latter the Apostle speaks in the words which I have just read; which will lead me to set before you,

I. The advantage which the spiritual man enjoys above all others—

“He judges all things”—

[Of course, we must understand this observation as relating to those things only which come properly before him *as a spiritual man*: for, in relation to arts and sciences, or indeed to any thing which is within the reach of the natural man, he has no advantage whatever. Solomon speaks in the same unqualified terms: “Evil men understand not judgment: but they that seek the Lord, understand *all things*^a.” St. John also uses nearly the same language: “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know *all things*^b.” But common sense, as well as experience, shews, that we must limit the assertion to those things which pertain to the salvation of the soul. And here I might enumerate a great variety of things: but I will content myself with specifying two, which will carry their own evidence along with them.

The spiritual man, then, “discerns” (*that* is the meaning of the word, which we translate “judgeth,” and it is so translated in the margin of our Bibles) *wherein true happiness consists*: he sees it, knows it, feels it, and has his judgment completely made up upon it. He discerns that his happiness, as a rational and immortal being, is bound up in communion with God as a reconciled God and Father, and in a conformity to his image. By this view of happiness, all earthly things are cut off at once from any share of this honour, any further than they are made subservient to the bringing of Almighty God nigh unto us, or to the transformation of our souls into his likeness. In forming this judgment, the spiritual man inquires what constituted the happiness of man in his first creation. And here he has no more doubt than he has about the happiness of the heavenly hosts. And with this agrees his own experience. For he can have no comfort in his soul whilst he is in doubt whether God is reconciled to him, or whilst the light of God’s reconciled countenance is hid from him. Nor can he find any true comfort whilst he feels within him any reigning sin, or any unmortified lust whatever — — —

Next, he discerns *the means by which alone this happiness can be attained*. He sees that it can be attained only by the simple exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by that only that he can obtain reconciliation with God, or a sense of

^a Prov. xxviii. 5.

^b 1 John ii. 20, 27.

the Divine favour in his soul. It is by that alone that he can obtain "the witness of the Spirit," or "the earnest of the Spirit," or "the sealing of the Spirit," which are necessary to elevate his soul above all earthly things: as the Apostle has said; "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith^c." It is by that, too, that he attains the Divine image on his soul, even by "the faith that purifieth the heart^d." In a word, it is by the simple exercise of faith that he receives every thing out of the fulness that is in Christ, and is filled with that "love of Christ that *constrains* him," as a mighty torrent, "to live no more unto himself, but unto Him who died for him, and rose again^e."]

"But he himself is judged and discerned of no man"—

[The natural man does not discern these things. However he may speculate upon such things, there is not a natural man in the whole world that *truly and practically* discerns them, *so as to have the same fixed judgment in relation to them that the spiritual man has*. The natural man knows not how to estimate the spiritual man, either in relation to his principles or conduct. Judge him indeed he will, and confidently enough; setting him down for a weak enthusiast, if not for a designing hypocrite. But, to form a just estimate of him, he has no power. He has no idea of spiritual enjoyment; no conception of the efficacy of faith: consequently the experience of the spiritual man appears to him a mere delusion, a fanatical conceit. His pretensions to joys which the natural man never experienced, appear as wild as if he claimed the possession of a sense which none but himself and a few other favoured persons had ever exercised. Suppose, for instance, when all the world besides were destitute of some one of the senses that we enjoy; say, of sight, or hearing, or smelling; and one were to profess that he was enabled by that particular organ to distinguish things which the others could not perceive; would they not account him a deceiver? Just so do the ungodly world account the true Christian, who by faith discerns the excellency of those things which never were discerned by the eye of sense: they are ready to exclaim, as Felix to Paul, "Thou art beside thyself: much learning (or much conceit) hath made thee mad." But Paul was "not mad:" nor are they mad who seek their happiness in the way before described. If they appear so, it is because their principles and conduct are not duly appreciated. Not that he has any new *sense*: for *that*

^c 1 John v. 4.

^d Acts xv. 9. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^e 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

he certainly has not. But a new *perception* he has^f: and by means of that he is enabled to judge of these things *as they are*. At the same time, he himself is judged of no man; because no natural man does view things as they are; he never takes eternity sufficiently into his account: if he did, he would see, at once, that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do thereafter: the praise of it endureth for ever^g.”]

Let me now proceed to point out,

II. The true source of his superiority—

The natural man possesses not that kind of knowledge whereby to instruct him—

[What, I would ask, is the standard of true wisdom? Is it not “the mind of the Lord?” Is there a man in all the world that believes in a divine revelation, and will, for a moment, controvert this truth? Let this, then, be settled in our minds: let this be admitted as a point agreed upon by all parties: let this be laid down as an axiom, which admits of no doubt:

THE MIND OF THE LORD IS THE ONLY STANDARD OF TRUE WISDOM.

Now then, I will ask, What natural man knows that mind? There are but two ways in which he can know it; namely, either by the written word alone, or by a special revelation of it to his soul. But by the written word alone (whether with *human* instruction, or without) he cannot understand it; as we are told in the words before my text: “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for *they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them*, because they are spiritually discerned^h.” As for a spiritual revelation of them to his soul, *that* is out of the question: for if he had that, he would already have become a spiritual man: but, not having received that, he neither knows, nor can “know, the mind of the Lord;” and consequently cannot instruct the spiritual man, either in a way of refutation, or of more accurate and enlarged information. If he attempt to dogmatize on such subjects, he will only betray his own ignorance, which even a babe, if taught of God, will discover.]

But the spiritual man possesses that very knowledge which is requisite for his guidance in the divine life—

[“He has the mind of Christ:” he has it revealed to his

^f Phil. i. 9, 10. See the Greek, *πάση αἰσθήσει· εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ἡμῶς τὰ ὑπερόντα*.

^g Ps. cxi. 10.

^h ver. 14.

soul by the Spirit of God: as St. Paul has said, "God hath given him the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of his Sonⁱ." Nay, "he is himself one spirit with Christ^k," and "has in him the very mind that was in Christ^l." He has, "according to the measure of the gift of Christ," the very "law of God himself written in his heart^m;" so that he may be "seen and known of all men to be an epistle of Christ, written, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living Godⁿ." True, indeed, he always needs fresh instruction from above; and will, even to his dying hour, have occasion for that prayer, "What I know not, teach thou me." At first he is only "a babe, and unskilful in the word of righteousness: and it is not till after his spiritual senses have been long exercised to discern both good and evil^o," that he attains the fuller "mind of Christ." But, even as "a babe, he has opened to his view things which are hid from the wise and prudent^p;" and an inward monitor, saying, "This is the way, walk thou in it^q." Hence, therefore, whatever superiority a natural man may have over him in relation to the things of time and sense, he is himself superior to the natural man in reference to the things of the Spirit; nor can the natural man either add any thing unto him, or correct him.]

WHAT THEN SHALL I SAY? I will say to every one that is taught of the Spirit,

1. Regard not the ridicule of an ignorant and ungodly world—

[They will ridicule you; and they will despise you; and they will represent all your pursuits as folly: but "they know not what they say; nor do they understand whereof they affirm." Nay, they themselves have a secret consciousness, that, at least *in the main* you are right. This do then: Ask them if they are right: ask them on what their own conduct is founded, whether on the commands of God, or on the dictates of the world. Ask them which is the more likely to issue well at last, a life of worldly conformity, or a life devoted to God. I mean not by this to encourage any thing that is really enthusiastic or absurd. You must doubtless "walk in wisdom towards them that are without," and "give no occasion to any one to speak reproachfully:" but you must nevertheless maintain a holy and consistent conduct; and, "if reproached or persecuted for righteousness' sake, you must rejoice^r," and bless God, who has counted you worthy of such an honour^s.]

ⁱ Eph. i. 17, 18.

^m Jer. xxxi. 33.

^p Matt. xi. 25.

^r Matt. v. 11, 12.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 17.

ⁿ 2 Cor. iii. 3.

^q Isai. xxx. 21. with Matt. xii. 34, 35.

^s Acts v. 41. with 1 Cor. iv. 3.

^l Phil. ii. 5.

^o Heb. v. 13, 14.

2. Study diligently the mind of God in his word—

[*That*, as we have observed, is the one only standard either for faith or practice; and from that alone can the mind of God be ascertained. Though the Spirit is necessary for your guidance into truth, it is only by and through the word that he will instruct you. He will not bring to your minds any one truth that is not there revealed. Study, therefore, the word; and study it with fervent prayer to God for the teaching of his good Spirit: and never adopt, either in sentiment or practice, any one thing which may not be clearly proved by God's written word.]

3. Let your pretensions to “the mind of Christ” be justified by your conformity to his example—

[If you “have indeed the mind of Christ,” you will undoubtedly “walk as he walked^t.” He came, not only to redeem you by his blood, but also “to set you an example, that you should follow his steps^u.” Let it be seen, then, that Christ is with you of a truth: that in all your tempers and dispositions you resemble him; in your deadness to the world; in your devotedness to God; in your meekness and patience, your kindness and benevolence, your purity and holiness, your self-denial and zeal. It is by this only that the world can judge of your pretensions to a superior knowledge of his mind: and by this will your improvement of your advantages be tried in the last day. Shew that, *in these respects*, you are “one with Christ” now^x; and doubt not but you shall be one with him, to all eternity, in a better world.]

^t 1 John ii. 6.^u 1 Pet. ii. 21.^x John xvii. 21.

MDCCCCXLIV.

UNDUE PARTIALITY TO MINISTERS REPROVED.

1 Cor. iii. 5—7. *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*

WE are apt to conceive of the primitive Churches as patterns of all perfection; and doubtless there were amongst them many individuals whose attainments in piety were truly apostolic: but there were in most of the Churches as great blemishes as can be

found in any society of Christians at the present day. The Church of Corinth was peculiarly corrupt. They were indeed distinguished for gifts^a; but, in respect of graces, too many of them were sadly deficient. One evil especially obtained amongst them to a great extent; namely, the indulging of a contentious spirit, by means of which the Church was divided into parties; some accounting themselves followers “of Paul, others of Apollos, others of Cephas, and others of Christ^b.” Now, though this evil did not prevail so far as utterly to subvert their souls, it kept them in a low, and, as it were, an infantine state; insomuch that the Apostle “could not speak to them as to spiritual” persons, who had made any considerable advances in the divine life; but was forced to address them as mere “babes in Christ,” to whom he could only administer “milk,” when he would gladly have rather “fed them with meat^c.” Their being “puffed up for one minister against another^d” shewed that a great measure of “carnality was yet in their hearts^e;” and that, though spiritual in the main, they yet conducted themselves too much like the “men” of this world, whose chief zeal was occupied in contending for the leaders of their respective sects.

The same spirit, as might be expected, still infests the Christian Church. And that we may be put on our guard against it, I will endeavour to shew,

I. In what light ministers should be viewed—

They are instruments, whereby God carries on his work in the souls of men—

[God is pleased to work by means, and to make use of men for the accomplishing of his gracious purposes in the world. Even when he has employed *angels*, he has still chosen to put honour upon *men* as his immediate instruments of good; as when he directed Cornelius to send for Peter to instruct him, and removed from Peter’s mind the scruples which would have kept him from executing that office of love. Though God might as easily effect his work without instruments, yet he has decreed

^a 1 Cor. i. 5.

^b 1 Cor. i. 12.

^c ver. 1, 2.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 6.

^e ver. 3, 4.

that “faith shall come by hearing:” and where no minister is sent to till the ground, there is one great desert, in which no plant of righteousness is found, no real goodness exists. The land uncultivated brings forth nothing but briars and thorns. Human learning, to whatever extent it be carried, can produce no spiritual change in the heart of man. The most learned philosopher needs instruction from God’s ministers, no less than the untutored savage: yea, and to the end of life, no less than at the commencement of his Christian course, does every saint require the aid of ministerial exertions, to “water” that which Divine grace has “planted” in his soul: and the more exalted any man’s attainments are, the more highly will he esteem the ordinances of God, and the more sensible will he be of his dependence on them for a supply of those blessings which he stands in need of.]

They are, however, mere instruments, and nothing more—

[They can effect nothing of themselves: not even Paul himself, with all his eloquence and force of reasoning, could bring conviction to the minds of his hearers: the very discourses which converted some, only irritated others against him, and caused them to regard him as “a babbler,” and a maniac^f. If any received his word aright, it was because God had “opened their hearts to attend to it.” “Whether he planted, or Apollos watered, it was God alone who gave the increase.” This is universally felt and acknowledged in the natural world. There may be a great disparity between the skill and industry of different labourers: yet no one ever thinks of ascribing the harvest to the skill of man: every one knows, that without the influences of the sun and rain the husbandman will cultivate his land in vain. And the same is true respecting ministers, who will labour to no purpose, if God do not accompany their word with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. The very best of men are but as “a voice crying in the wilderness,” as unable in themselves to convert a soul as they are to raise the dead.]

The manner in which St. Paul speaks of them, will lead us to consider,

II. The importance of forming a right estimate of their labours—

A just view of them will teach us,

1. To moderate our regards for man—

^f Acts xxvi. 24.

[We are apt to idolize those from whose ministry we have derived benefit to our souls. From their labours we expect a blessing which we scarcely hope to derive from any other quarter; and a secret dissatisfaction arises in our minds, if, at any time, his place be occupied by a less-favoured minister. We forget that neither the word, nor the power with which it has been accompanied, were his; and we are ready to ascribe to him the honour which is due to God alone. But if we duly considered that ministers are only the channels of communication between the Fountain and us, and that the waters by which we have been refreshed have proceeded from God alone, we should look through them to God, and limit both our expectations and our gratitude to Him, from whom alone any spiritual good can flow. I say not that we are to feel no gratitude towards them: for "we are to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake." Nor do I say that some measure of partiality may not fitly be shewn towards those to whom, under God, we owe our own souls: for "though we have ten thousand instructors, yet have we but one Father," to whom, therefore, we owe a filial regard: but such a measure of attachment to one, as leads us to undervalue others, is a mere carnal feeling, which ought to be suppressed. St. Paul *repeatedly appealed* to the Corinthians themselves respecting this: whilst ye indulge such partialities, "*are ye not carnal? yea, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk as carnal men?*" I may say, therefore, that a just estimate of the labours of ministers will prevent an undue rivalry amongst them in our affections.]

2. To augment our dependence of God—

[The husbandman, when his fields are sown, looks to God for a blessing on his labours. In like manner will our eyes be directed to God alone for a spiritual harvest, if we be thoroughly convinced that he is the only source from whence it can spring. We shall not look to the creature, but to God, in and through the creature: and to the same gracious Giver of all good shall we render thanks for all the good we have received; ever mindful that it has proceeded from his Holy Spirit, "who divideth to every man severally as he will." We shall be afraid of provoking God to jealousy, by ascribing to man any part of that glory which belongs to HIM: and we shall live in the very frame of those who are around the throne of God; who, ever mindful of the benefits they have received from him, are singing, "salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever." As in heaven, so on earth, the creature will be "*nothing*;" but God will be "all in all^g."]

^g "Neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth, is *any thing*."

Let me found on this subject,

1. Some matter of inquiry—

[What benefit have you received from all the labours of your minister? Are there not many who are as ignorant and as worldly as if they had never heard the Gospel at all? You can bear me witness, that, from the beginning, “I have never known any thing amongst you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;” and yet how many of you have derived no benefit to your souls! To what has this been owing? I acknowledge, with shame, that the word has been ministered to you in much weakness; but if Paul or Apollos had ministered unto you, even their labour would have been lost, it is to be feared, on many of you, because you have not regarded the word as *God’s*, nor looked to him for a blessing upon it — — — To some, we would hope, the word has not been altogether in vain: but would it not have taken far more effect, if you had looked less to the creature, and more to God? — — — I pray you to be on your guard respecting this. The brazen serpent was broken to pieces as “*Nehushtan*” (*a piece of brass*) because to it was transferred the honour that was due to God alone. Cease! O cease from all “*carnal*” partialities! and, by whomsoever God shall speak to you, “receive the word, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God.”]

2. Some ground of encouragement—

[Behold what God has wrought by means of a few poor fishermen! And can he not make his word effectual for *you*? Is it not “*sharper than any two-edged sword?*” and shall it not still be “*mighty, through Him, to the pulling down of strongholds, and to the casting down every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ?*” It gained not its efficacy from the wisdom of Paul; nor shall it lose its efficacy because spoken by me. God has ordained, that “*by the foolishness of preaching he will save them that believe:*” and if ye receive our testimony, however weak it may be, it shall prove “*the power of God to the salvation of your souls.*” Direct your eyes, then, simply to the Lord; and, “*since ye are not straitened in him, be not straitened in your own souls.*” Only let your expectations be from Him alone, and you shall not be disappointed of your hope. “*Open your mouth wide; and he will fill it.*”]

MDCCCCXLV.

CHRIST THE ONLY FOUNDATION.

1 Cor. iii. 11. *Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

THERE is not any thing more injurious to the Church of God than a party-spirit: yet even in the apostolic age did it begin to distract the Christian community. At Corinth it prevailed, and rose to an alarming height: and St. Paul was obliged to exert all his influence in order to counteract it. He reminded the partisans, that, as "God's building," they should be cemented together with brotherly love: that they should study to shew themselves worthy of the place they held in the Church, in expectation of that day when all their works should be tried by fire: and that, instead of fomenting strifes and divisions, they should unite with each other in cleaving steadfastly to the one foundation, whereon they stood.

The declaration in the text is plain, and of infinite importance—

To enter more fully into it we shall consider,

I. What foundations men lay for themselves—

Every man has some foundation for his hope. Though there are many shades of difference in the sentiments of different men, yet their grounds of hope may be reduced to two:

1. Their own goodness—

[Some think that nothing but gross sin can expose them to the wrath of God. They therefore congratulate themselves as having never done any thing to merit his displeasure. Others imagine that they may trust in the good works that they have done. They have, in their own apprehension, been regular in their duties to God and man: nor can they conceive that *they* should have any reason to fear. Thus, like the Pharisee of old, they thank God that they are not as other men; and are filled with self-complacency, because they are punctual in the observance of certain duties^a.]

^a Luke xviii. 11, 12.

2. Their own works and Christ's merits united—

[Many, who see that their own works cannot justify them according to the strict tenour of the law, yet hope that they will, according to the milder demands of the Gospel. If they see that these will not suffice, they will look to Christ to supply their deficiencies. If they see that such an union is impracticable, and, that Jesus must be their only foundation, they hope, however, that he will save them for their works' sake. Thus they either avowedly profess to participate with Christ the honour of their salvation; or, while they pretend to give the honour of it to him, they look for the original and moving cause of it within themselves. Like the Judaizing Christians^b, or the Gentiles whom Peter misled^c, they unite the law to Christ; as though Christ needed to have something superadded to him, to render his death effectual. At all events, if they find their error in this respect, they will regard their works as *their warrant* to believe in Christ; and will expect mercy at his hands, not so much because his grace is free and all-sufficient, as because they have something in themselves, which may deserve his notice and regard.]

These plans of salvation however will be found very erroneous, if we inquire,

II. What is that foundation which God has laid—

Nothing can be more clear, than that he has not laid either of those, which have been before mentioned—

[He often describes his people as performing good works: and often promises them, under that character, eternal life. But he always represents us as sinners, and as standing in need of his mercy. And he has sent his Son into the world for that very reason, because none could obtain mercy by any works of their own. Nor has he less clearly shewn, that works are *wholly* to be excluded from the office of justifying. He has told us, that salvation must be wholly of grace or wholly of works^d. That every degree of boasting is excluded from that salvation which he has revealed^e. And that the persons, whom he justifies, are ungodly, and without any works whatever to recommend them^f.]

Christ is the one foundation which he has laid in Zion—

[He “has set forth his Son to be a propitiation for sin:” and every sinner is to build his hope on Christ alone. Christ

^b Acts xv. 5.

^c Gal. ii. 12, 14.

^d Rom. xi. 6.

^e Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^f Rom. iv. 5.

is the foundation laid in the covenant of grace^g. The same is laid in all the promises^h. The same was exhibited in all the typesⁱ. The same is laid also in the Gospel^k. We are expressly told that there is no other^l. Nor indeed can there be any other to all eternity.]

The necessity of building upon this will appear, while we consider,

III. Why no other can be laid—

Many reasons might easily be assigned: but one or two may suffice:

1. Any other would be unworthy of the Divine Architect—

[God himself is the architect^m; and must have all the glory of beginning and perfecting this building. But, if men were to found their hopes on any thing but the Lord Jesus Christ, they would have whereof to gloryⁿ. So far as respect was had to any merit in them, so far might they ascribe the honour to themselves. Even in heaven their song must differ from that of the redeemed. Instead of giving *all* the glory to God and to the Lamb^o, they must take a portion of it to themselves. But this would be utterly unworthy of God to suffer. Indeed he has told us that he never can nor will suffer it^p. We may be sure therefore that no such way of salvation shall ever be established, as leaves man at liberty to boast. We shall be rewarded *according* to our works, and in some respect *for* our works; but the only ground of acceptance, either for our persons or our services, is in Christ alone^q.]

2. No other would support the weight that is to be laid upon it—

[Whatever our souls need in time or eternity must be derived from that, which is the foundation of our hope. Our pardon must be obtained by it; our peace flow from it; our strength and righteousness be given us on account of it; and eternal glory be bestowed on us, as the reward of it. And can we build our hope of such things in any degree on our own works? Can we, who, if we had done all that is commanded us, should be only unprofitable servants, imagine, that we can in any respect merit such things, when we have done nothing

^g Gen. xvii. 19. Heb. viii. 6.

^h Gen. iii. 15. and xxii. 18. 2 Cor. i. 20.

ⁱ The Paschal Lamb, the Scape Goat, &c. ^k 1 Pet. ii. 4—6.

^l Acts iv. 12. ^m ver. 9. ⁿ Rom. iv. 2.

^o Rev. v. 13. ^p 1 Cor. i. 29, 31. Eph. ii. 8, 9.

^q Eph. i. 6.

that is commanded us, at least, nothing perfectly, or as we ought to have done it? Surely such an hope would soon appear to be a foundation of sand; and would infallibly disappoint us to our eternal ruin. Yea, the very persons who build on such a foundation, almost invariably deny, that any man can be assured of his acceptance with God; they account such an assurance to be an enthusiastic delusion; which is a clear acknowledgment of the insufficiency of *their* foundation to bear this weight.]

INFER,

1. How needful is it to inquire what foundation we are upon!

[If we build but a common habitation, we are careful on what foundation we raise it. How much more care should we exercise, when we are building for eternity! Let us inquire, whether we have been deeply convinced of the insufficiency of our own goodness, and of the impossibility of uniting any works of ours with Christ's atoning sacrifice? And let us examine whether Christ's obedience unto death be our only hope, our only confidence? We never can be saved, unless, with Paul, we utterly renounce the filthy rags of our own righteousness, and desire to be found clad in Christ's unspotted robe^r.]

2. How secure are they who are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ!

[Christ, on whom they stand, is justly called "a *tried* stone, and a *sure* foundation^s." He never yet failed those who trusted in him. The vilest of mankind have found him able to save them to the uttermost. He is a rock to those who trust in him; nor shall the gates of hell prevail against them^t. Let all believers then rejoice in their security; and hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering^u.]

3. How careful should we be, what superstructure we raise upon him!

[While Christ is the foundation of our hope, we are also to build upon him all our works. But our works will all be tried by fire. If they be not such as tend to his glory, they will be burnt up as hay, and wood, and stubble. If they be truly good, they will stand the trial, like gold, or silver, or precious stones^x. Let us then give diligent heed to our works. We may suffer loss *in* heaven, though we should not suffer the

^r Isai. lxiv. 6. Phil. iii. 9.

^t Matt. xvi. 18.

^u Heb. x. 23.

^s Isai. xxviii. 16.

^x ver. 11—14.

loss of heaven^y. Let us then seek “a full reward^z.” While we renounce good works *in point of dependence*, let us practise them *from love to our Redeemer*. Thus shall we put to silence our adversaries; and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.]

^y ver. 15.

^z 2 John, ver. 8.

MDCCCCXLVI.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THOSE WHO BUILD UPON THE TRUE FOUNDATION.

1 Cor. iii. 12—15. *Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

IN our natural state, we follow the dictates of our own will, without consulting the honour of our God. Even after we are converted to God, there yet remains within us a proneness to follow our own inclinations, except as Divine grace counteracts that propensity, and prevails against it. In the Corinthian Church there were many awful proofs of this fact. The irregularities which obtained amongst them, were both numerous and deeply reprehensible. A party-spirit in particular created very grievous dissensions among them. St. Paul, reproving their unbecoming conduct, reminds both the preachers who fomented such divisions, and the people who were drawn aside by them, that their eternal happiness would be advanced or diminished in proportion as they cultivated or neglected a Christian temper; and that, if they would be approved of their God in the day of judgment, they must not only build on the right foundation, but raise upon it a superstructure that should be worthy of it.

To elucidate the words before us, we shall shew,

I. What is that superstructure which we ought to raise upon the true foundation—

Among the persons who rely on Christ as their only hope, there is a great diversity both of sentiment and action. This is intimated by the different images under which their conduct is represented in the text.

There are some whose actions may be compared to “wood, and hay, and stubble”—

[There were in the apostolic age two sets of teachers, who occasioned much strife and dissension in the different churches; namely, those who contended for the observance of the Mosaic ritual, and those who introduced into religion the dogmas of philosophy — — — Persons of similar dispositions and sentiments have infested the Church in every age. Some are distracting the minds of those around them with subtle questions and unedifying disputes about doctrines; others are magnifying the external forms of Church-government, as if they were of equal importance with the most fundamental articles of our faith; and others are bringing forward some fond conceits, which, from a desire of popularity and distinction, they propagate with all their might — — — How justly the superstructure which these men raise, may be compared to “wood, and hay, and stubble,” appears from the natural tendency, and universal effect, of their exertions: for, instead of edifying the Church in faith and love, their doctrines uniformly lead to error—to contention—to bondage. Hence it is that St. Paul studiously dissuaded all ministers from engaging in such unprofitable disputes, and all Christians from being led astray by them^a — — —]

But those actions which we ought to be performing, may rather be compared to “gold, and silver, and precious stones”—

[As the Apostles themselves were, so have many in all successive ages been, intent on cultivating, both in themselves and others, all the graces of the Spirit. It has been their ambition, whilst they have founded all their hopes on Christ, to shew, by the holiness of their lives, that the Gospel is indeed “a doctrine according to godliness”— — — Now such a superstructure does indeed resemble the materials here mentioned; for it is valuable in itself—suitable to the foundation—ornamental to the edifice—and worthy of the Divine Inhabitant. Such is the superstructure which we all should raise: and it is the orderly accumulation of such materials as these, which assimilates the Church to that temple wherein God visibly

^a He bids us beware of the subtilties of philosophy, on the one hand, Col. ii. 8. 1 Tim. iv. 7. and vi. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 16, 23. and of the bigotry of superstition on the other, 1 Tim. i. 3, 4. Tit. iii. 9.

resided^b, or rather, to that more glorious temple wherein he dwells invisible to mortal eyes^c.]

That we may be stimulated to care and diligence in these things, let us consider,

II. The importance of erecting such an edifice as will be approved of by God—

This is set forth by the Apostle in very awful and appropriate terms :

1. Our works will all be tried as by fire—

[In that day when God shall judge the world, “ he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the most secret counsels of our hearts.” As the Judaizing teachers of old, or the philosophical reasoners, conceived that they were actuated solely by a regard for truth, while they were in reality instigated by pride and bigotry ; so the contentious disputers about doubtful points of doctrine, or indifferent matters in Church-government, little think “ what spirit they are of.” But, as fire tries the metals, and discovers the dross that is in them ; so will that fiery trial discover the unworthy mixtures with which our most specious actions were debased. It is to no purpose therefore to deceive ourselves ; for we shall most assuredly be undeceived in that solemn day, when “ the fire shall try every man’s work, of what sort it is.”]

2. The works that are approved will add to our eternal happiness—

[Every grace which we exercise, is pleasing and acceptable to God. “ A meek and quiet spirit,” and consequently every other holy disposition, “ is in the sight of God an ornament of great price.” It is the *mind*, which God regards. A contrite sigh, a grateful aspiration, an adoring look, are of more value in his eyes than all the zeal or subtilty which ingenious disputants or pharisaic bigots can exercise. Nor shall a pious thought or desire pass unnoticed or unrewarded.]

3. The works which are disapproved will detract from our felicity—

[It is supposed that we unfeignedly build upon the right foundation ; and that this will secure our acceptance with God. But the degree of our happiness will depend entirely on the superstructure which we raise. We may suffer loss *in* heaven, even though we should not suffer the loss *of* heaven. Known deliberate sins will rob us of heaven itself : and mistaken

^b 1 Chron. xxix. 2, 7, 8.

^c Rev. xxi. 18, 19.

services, so far from increasing our reward, will diminish it. The person who has “added grace to grace with holy zeal and diligence, will have an entrance ministered unto him *abundantly* into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour^d.” On the other hand, they whose spirit is less agreeable to the mind of God, will be saved only “as brands plucked out of the burning.” Wherein the precise difference will consist, we do not know. It is sufficient that we are informed it does exist, and will certainly be manifest at the last day. Some “will suffer loss,” and others “receive a full reward.” Surely this consideration may well make us careful to regulate our minds by the sacred oracles, and to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us look well to our foundation—

[It is obvious that, if they who build on the right foundation may be “*scarcely* saved,” they who are not fixed on that, cannot be saved *at all*. Let us remember then that Christ is the only foundation of our hopes, and that we must depend solely on the merit of his blood and righteousness^e. Every other hope must be renounced: and we must say with the Church of old, “In the Lord alone have I righteousness and strength.”]

2. Let us look well to our superstructure—

[The caution in the text clearly proves, that persons, upright in the main, are yet liable to err, and to be heaping up rubbish for the fire while they fancy that they are doing God service^f. Let us therefore take heed to our ways, and “take heed to our spirit.” Let us not only endeavour to live and act for God, but to do every thing from such *motives*, and in such a *manner*, as shall be approved by him in the day of judgment.]

^d 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

^e ver. 11. with Isai. xxviii. 16.

^f It is often said, ‘These persons are *pious*; and therefore God will not let them be deceived.’ The text gives a complete answer to this.

MDCCCXLVII.

THE DANGER OF DEFILING GOD’S TEMPLE.

1 Cor. iii. 16, 17. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

EVERY passion of the human mind should be called forth in aid of vital godliness. The saints indeed

are more influenced by considerations that excite their love and gratitude: but they still need to be sometimes impressed with truths that may awaken a holy fear and jealousy, especially when their conduct has been such as to deserve reproof. The Corinthians were in a high degree culpable on account of their contentions: the Apostle therefore warns them of the consequences of acting in a manner so unworthy of their profession.

In discoursing on his words, we shall consider,

I. The acknowledged privilege of Christians—

Christians, like the temple of old, are the habitation of God—

[The temple was the place where God dwelt in a more especial manner. Not only was the visible symbol of his presence there, but there also he manifested himself to his people in tokens of his love and communications of his grace. Thus does he also now reveal himself in his church^a: yea, every individual believer is thus consecrated to his service, and honoured as his immediate residence^b.]

Nor is this a doubtful, but a clear acknowledged, privilege—

[Ignorant people may doubt “whether there be any Holy Ghost^c,” but true Christians know him, and know themselves to be his habitation. St. Paul frequently appealed to the Corinthians respecting this, not imagining that any one of them could entertain a doubt of it^d. They must have often read of it in the Jewish scriptures^e — — — Often too must they have heard it from him: nor could they fail of knowing it from their own experience. If for an instant they reflected on the light, the strength, the consolations with which they had been favoured, they could not but ascribe them to the agency of God's Spirit — — — and consequently they must be conscious of his dwelling in them as in his temple. Believers at this day have certainly not less grounds for drawing the same inference with respect to themselves: for they also are “a spiritual house^f,” and therefore they may, and should, know, that they are in the actual enjoyment of this privilege.]

But as this privilege is attended both with duties and dangers, let us consider,

^a Eph. ii. 20—22.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^c Acts xix. 2.

^d Compare with the text, 1 Cor. vi. 19. and 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^e Neh. ix. 20. Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

II. The declaration founded upon it—

God denounces the heaviest judgments against those who abuse this privilege—

[He would not suffer any unclean person to enter into his temple of old, however free he might be from *moral* pollution, or however ignorantly he might have contracted his *ceremonial* defilement[§]. These ordinances were intended to shew, that sin of any kind, and much more such as now prevailed among the Christians at Corinth, was extremely hateful in his sight: such purity does he require in all that come nigh unto him. Doubtless there are errors, both in faith and practice, which, though injurious to his people's happiness[¶], will not destroy the relation that subsists between him and them^{||}: but, if they be of such a kind as to affect the foundation of the Christian's hope, or greatly to dishonour the superstructure, they will surely bring down the divine judgments on all who harbour them[¶]. This is declared respecting every kind of open immorality^{||}: but it is declared also, with very remarkable force and energy, respecting any departure from the principles of the Gospel, or any declension from a life of entire devotedness to God. St. Paul says to these very Corinthians, "I fear, lest as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so any of you should be *corrupted* from the simplicity that is in Christ[¶]." Why does he use the term "*corrupted*?" Why does he not say, *turned* from the simplicity that is in Christ? Why does he use the very same word as in my text is translated by the terms "defile," and "destroy?" No doubt he intended to shew us, that any great departure from Christian principles would *corrupt*, *defile*, and *destroy* the soul: and it is a fact, that such a dereliction of Christian simplicity does *proceed from corruption in the soul*, and will *generate corruption in the life*. This idea is strongly confirmed by what the Apostle elsewhere says of those who propagate specious errors, being "vainly puffed by their fleshly mind[¶]. They do, in reality, the devil's work[¶]: and him they serve under the semblance of an angel of light[¶]. Beware then of his devices, of whatever kind they be, lest ye bring upon yourselves destruction from the Lord.]

This denunciation is even founded on the privilege itself—

§ Numb. xix. 13.

¶ ver. 15.

|| ver. 12—15.

¶ φθειρει, must import such a degree of defilement as has a tendency to destroy; because the destruction menaced is also expressed by the word φθειρει.

|| 1 Cor. vi. 18.

¶ 2 Cor. xi. 3. καταργ.

¶ Col. ii. 18.

° The text.

¶ 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14.

[Why was God so jealous of the honour of his temple, but because it was his immediate residence? the more nearly it was connected with him, the more was he himself dishonoured by any pollutions introduced into it. Thus we also, instead of having any reason to hope for impunity on account of our relation to him, are taught to expect rather the heavier indignation, if we provoke the eyes of his glory^a. He may not indeed depart instantly and at once; because he is long-suffering as in the days of old. In forsaking his temple at Jerusalem, he removed to the threshold of the temple first^r, and then to the court of the temple^s, and then to the door of the east gate^t, and then to the mountain^u, that very Mount of Olives, from whence Jesus, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, afterwards took his departure from the midst of them. So he may be often grieved by us before he finally departs from us: but we may so resist his sacred motions as ultimately to "quench" them^x: and then he will abandon us to our utter ruin^y.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us seek to possess this great privilege—

[As to be visited by an earthly monarch would be a higher honour than to be admitted into his palace, so to have God dwelling in our hearts on earth is even a higher honour than to be admitted into his temple above. Shall we not then be solicitous to obtain it? when God has designed that we should even know ourselves possessed of it, and enjoy all the happiness arising from it, shall we treat it with contempt, as a mere phantom of a heated imagination? Let us open wide the doors of our hearts, that the King of glory may enter in^z. With *the Spirit* of God dwelling in us, we shall have "all good things^a," peace, joy, strength, purity, yea, an earnest and foretaste of our heavenly inheritance^b. Let us never cease from our importunity till we have obtained from our God this "unspeakable gift^c."]

2. Let us be careful lest we abuse this privilege—

[Doctrines arising from human systems, even though they be true in themselves, must never be pressed into the service of sin, or be brought to enervate the force of declarations, which, though apparently opposite, are equally clear and true.

^a Amos iii. 2. ^r Ezek. ix. 3. and x. 4. ^s Ezek. x. 18.

^t Ezek. x. 19. ^u Ezek. xi. 23.

^x Gen. vi. 3. ^y 1 Thess. v. 19.

^z 2 Chron. xv. 2. Ezek. xviii. 24. 2 Pet. ii. 22.

^a Ps. xxiv. 7. ^b Luke xi. 13. with Matt. vii. 11.

^c Eph. i. 13, 14. ^c 2 Cor. ix. 15.

If some truths are revealed for the confirming of our stability, others are intended to create within us a holy jealousy. Instead therefore of attempting to invalidate the declaration before us, let us flee from those defilements which alone can make it formidable. Let us maintain that purity of heart which God requires, and study to "be holy as God is holy." Especially must we guard against abusing our privilege by enthusiastic conceits on the one hand, or presumptuous confidence on the other. The Spirit's operations do not supersede our efforts, but rather encourage them, and work by them^d: yet are they not to be discerned, except, like the wind, by their effects^e. Let your life, then, testify that God is with you of a truth. "And I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be sanctified wholly, and preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ^f."]

^d Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^e John iii. 8.

^f 1 Thess. v. 23.

MDCCCXLVIII.

THE MEANS OF ATTAINING TRUE WISDOM.

1 Cor. iii. 18. *Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

CONCERNING the nature of true wisdom, God and the world are at issue; the wisdom of man being foolishness with God, and the wisdom of God being foolishness with man^a. To what now must this be imputed? Is there any thing in the revelation which God has given us, that is contrary to right reason? or is it that man's reason is darkened, and that his intellectual powers, no less than his bodily appetites, are depraved by sin? We apprehend that an impartial judge will not hesitate long in determining this question. But here another question arises; How shall man in his present fallen state be brought to entertain the same judgment of things as God himself does? Must he get some new faculty, whereby he shall have an additional mode of perception? or is there any way whereby his present faculties, weakened as they are, may be made to answer all the

^a Compare 1 Cor. i. 18, 23. with iii. 19.

purposes for which they were originally given? To this we answer, that man does not want any new faculty, but only a new direction to the faculties he already possesses. We have a film upon the organs of vision, which needs to be removed: and for this end we must go to him who has said to us, "I counsel thee to buy of me eye-salve that thou mayest see^b." To the same effect is the advice given us in the text: "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise;" let him acknowledge, that he cannot see clearly at present; and let him submit to the operation of God's word and Spirit: thus shall the film be purged away from his eyes, and he shall "walk in the light, as God is in the light^c."

This direction we would now submit to your consideration; and, for the fuller understanding of it, we will endeavour to set before you,

I. *Its meaning.*

II. *Its reasonableness.*

III. *Its importance.*

I. *Its meaning.*

It cannot be supposed that we are to lay aside our reason: *that* were to "become fools" indeed. Reason, in those things that are *within* its sphere, is an useful, though not an infallible, guide. And, in the things that are *beyond* its sphere, it has its office: it ceases to be a guide indeed; but it becomes a companion, that must attend us every step we take, and often interpose its counsel in difficult conjunctures.

To become a fool, in the sense it is enjoined in the text, implies two things; first, *a consciousness of the weakness and fallibility of our reason, especially in things relating to God*: and secondly, *a willingness to submit our reason to the teachings of God's word and Spirit.*

That our reason is weak and fallible, we see every

^b Rev. iii. 18.

^c 1 John i. 7.

day and hour. How differently will men argue on the most common subjects, and yet with equal confidence of the truth of their opinions! How will those very arguments, which, under the influence of vanity, or interest, or passion, once seemed to a man unanswerable, afterwards appear to him frivolous in the extreme, when the bias that was upon his mind has ceased to operate!

But it is in things relating to God that the fallibility of our reason more especially appears. How ignorant are the heathen world respecting the will of God, and the way in which they are to obtain acceptance with him! And how crude are the notions, which many who have the Bible in their hands, form respecting the path of duty, and the way of salvation! How absurd, for instance, was the idea that Nicodemus formed of the new birth, when he conceived it to be a repetition of a natural birth^d! Thus it is with many amongst ourselves: they cannot hear of the new birth, or of justification by faith, or of the influences of the Spirit, without annexing to them ideas, if not as gross, yet quite as erroneous, as those of Nicodemus. But we may presume that Christ and his Apostles were right in their judgment of spiritual matters; and that others are right in proportion as they accord with them in sentiment, in spirit, and in conduct. In what light then will our boasted reason appear, if tried by this touchstone? Will not its dictates be found in direct opposition to the voice of inspiration, and consequently erroneous? Is there not such an universal departure from the scripture standard, that the few who adhere to it, are, as the prophet calls them, "Men wondered at"^e?

To become a fool, then, is to feel the insufficiency of our own reason, and to be sensible that we are exceeding prone to form wrong opinions on Divine subjects, insomuch that we need at all times greatly to distrust our own judgment.

But this expression implies also *a willingness to submit our reason to the teachings of God's word and*

^d John iii. 4, 9.

^e Zech. iii. 8.

Spirit. Men who have a high opinion of their own reason, are ever ready to bring the word of God to their bar, and to pass judgment on it as true or false, according as it agrees with, or opposes, their own preconceived opinions. They are not contented to let reason judge, whether the revelation itself be from God or not? (*that* is its proper office) but, having acknowledged it to be from God, they proceed to determine on the points that are revealed, exactly as if they were able with their shallow reason to fathom the depths of Divine wisdom.

This disposition must be mortified; and men, however learned or wise in the estimation of themselves and others, must submit to “be taught of God^f.” The only use of reason, as applied to revelation, is to ascertain, Whether the revelation, purporting to be from heaven, be indeed of Divine authority; and, What is the true import of that revelation in all its parts. These two points being ascertained, it is not the province of reason to judge whether a thing confessedly revealed, be true or not: *there* faith steps in, and supplies the defects of reason; and assures the mind, that the point itself is true, because it is revealed; and that if its truth do not appear evident to the eye of reason, it is not from any irrationality in the point itself, but from a want of clearness in our reason to discern it, and a want of purity in our hearts to receive it.

Thus, to become a fool, is to take the word of God with the simplicity of a little child; to acknowledge our inability to comprehend it; and to implore of God the influences of his Spirit, that “the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may be able to comprehend the heights and depths^g” of his revealed will. In short, it is to “receive with meekness the engrafted word^h,” and to pray with Job, “What I see not, teach thou meⁱ,” or with David, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law^k.”

^f John vi. 45.^g Eph. i. 18. and iii. 18.^h Jam. i. 21.ⁱ Job xxxiv. 32.^k Ps. cxix. 18.

Now it must be confessed, that this is humiliating to our proud reason; and that it is difficult for those who “seem wise in this world,” to condescend to receive instruction in such a way. But we shall find, that the Apostle’s direction, if duly considered, may be vindicated (as we are in the next place to shew) on the ground of,

II. Its reasonableness—

To become fools in order to be wise, however paradoxical it may appear, is, in the view of it before stated, most highly reasonable: for, in so doing, *we acknowledge nothing but what is undeniably true—and submit to nothing, but what we cheerfully submit to in the acquiring of human wisdom.*

We acknowledge nothing but what is undeniably true. Let us look into the Scriptures, and see how our characters are painted there. In them we are told, that “the god of this world hath blinded our eyes¹ :” that “we have walked hitherto in the vanity of our mind, having our understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts^m :” that, on this very account, we need “a spirit of wisdom and revelation to enlighten usⁿ :” that, in our conversion, our “eyes are opened,” and we are “turned from darkness unto light^o,” yea, are “brought out of darkness into marvellous light^p.” We are further told that, so far from having in ourselves a knowledge of the things of God, we do not even receive them when offered to our view; yea, we account them foolishness, neither can we know them, because we are destitute of that spiritual understanding whereby alone they can be discerned^q.

These are plain truths which require no comment.

Let us now see these truths exemplified. If we would state our argument in its most advantageous point of view, we should adduce the Gentile world as proofs of the fallibility of man’s reason; and shew,

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^m Eph. iv. 17, 18.

ⁿ Eph. i. 17.

^o Acts xxvi. 18.

^p 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^q 1 Cor. ii. 14.

that "by wisdom they knew not God^r." But we will waive this advantage, and take the instance of St. Paul, who had the Scriptures in his hands, who was educated under the most eminent teacher of his day, and who had made a proficiency in biblical learning beyond any of his own age. With these helps, we might well expect that reason should perform its office to admiration, and prove to the world, that it was not so vitiated as some imagine. Doubtless *he*, who had the advantage of living under the brightest, fullest dispensation of Gospel light, should in no respect continue in darkness: *he* must have clear views both of his duty to God, and of that method of salvation which had been typified in the Scriptures, and was now made plain by the preaching of a crucified Saviour. Yet behold, this very man was grossly ignorant both of the law, and of the Gospel too: he knew not that the law condemned the inmost workings of iniquity in the soul^s; or that the prophecies had been accomplished in Jesus^t. Nor, unless God had caused the "scales to fall from his eyes^u," would his reason ever have sufficed to rectify his views, or to keep him from being a self-righteous moralist, a furious zealot, and a bloody persecutor.

Thus much could reason do for *him*: "his very wisdom and knowledge, instead of guiding him aright, perverted him^x;" "he became vain in his imaginations, and his foolish heart was darkened; professing himself to be wise, he became a fool^y."

In addition to what has been thus stated and exemplified, we will only observe, that God speaks with utter indignation against those who fancy themselves wise, or expect ever to become so by the mere exertion of their own reason; "Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt^z."

Here then permit me to ask; Does not God know more of us than we do of ourselves? and, Do not the

^r 1 Cor. i. 21.

^s Rom. vii. 7, 9.

^t 1 Tim. i. 13.

^u Acts ix. 18.

^x Isai. xlvii. 10.

^y Rom. i. 21, 22.

^z Job xi. 12.

passages that have been adduced, declare *at least* as much as they have been brought to establish? How much *more* they affirm, we shall not now inquire: but that they shew the fallibility of our reason in things relating to God, and the propriety of submitting our reason to the teaching of God's word and Spirit, no candid person will deny.

Is it not then reasonable that we should acknowledge these truths? Shall we make ourselves wiser than God? Will not the very attempt to do so be an irrefragable proof, that we are fools indeed?

But the reasonableness of becoming fools in order to be wise appears yet further, in that *it is the very thing which we cheerfully do in order to attain human wisdom.*

If a man begin to learn any science, and his preceptor tell him of some deep part of that science, which at first sight appears to involve in it a contradiction or absurdity; he does not presently determine that that point is false; but he conceives that there are things which he does not yet understand; and he contents himself with studying, in the method prescribed to him, those parts which are suited to his capacity, hoping that in due time he shall gain a further insight into those abstruser matters, and see the truth and reason of those things which he cannot at present comprehend, and which, through his ignorance of the intermediate points, he would not be able to comprehend, even if they were ever so clearly stated to him.

Now why should we not act thus with respect to religion? Has not that as great depths as any human science? Or rather, is it not more above the sphere of human intellect than any other science whatever?

But it will be asked, What are those first rudiments which we must understand well in order to qualify us for a deeper knowledge of the subject? To this we answer, (and O that God would impress it on all our minds!) **THE KNOWLEDGE OF OURSELVES IS THE KEY TO ALL OTHER KNOWLEDGE.** If we do not know by deep experience, that we are "wretched, and

miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked^a," we never can "know any other truth as we ought to know it." On *this* the whole Scripture turns. It is because of our guilt and misery, that we need the atoning blood, and unspotted righteousness, of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because of our blindness and pollution, that we need the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. It is because we are altogether destitute of any thing that is good, that we must be saved wholly by grace, and that we must receive "Christ as our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption^b." We may indeed obtain a head-knowledge of these things from books, while yet we remain as proud and unsanctified as the most ignorant heathen. But a real, spiritual, and saving knowledge of these things can be learned only by divine teaching, and must always be preceded by a knowledge of our own hearts: indeed, *it will always be exactly proportioned to our self-knowledge*: the more we feel ourselves destitute of wisdom, goodness, and strength, the more insight shall we have into "the deep things of God," and the more precious will every Scripture truth be to our souls.

We repeat the question then, Why should it be thought unreasonable to adopt this method of attaining heavenly wisdom, when it is the method we invariably pursue in the investigation of human sciences? Is it not reasonable that we should pay as much deference to God as to man? Or is religion alone, of all subjects, so easy to men's apprehension, that they who have never paid attention to its first principles, are yet competent to sit in judgment on its most mysterious truths? Surely, if a submission to any given process be judged reasonable in the prosecution of human knowledge, much more must it be so in the pursuit of that which is divine.

We must not be satisfied however with shewing the reasonableness of the direction before us; we must go on to state, in the last place,

^a Rev. iii. 17.

^b 1 Cor. i. 30.

III. *Its importance—*

Every word of God deserves our deep attention. But the exhortation in the text is singularly important; for first, *It declares the only way in which we can ever attain true wisdom.*

If we could attain the end by different means, it would be of the less consequence whether we used *these* means or not. But here is the door of knowledge; and the only question is, Whether we will enter in by it or not. It requires us to stoop, yea, to stoop much lower than we wish: but stoop we must; or else we can never gain admission to “the secrets of God’s covenant^c.” God holds the key of knowledge in his own hand: “he alone can give wisdom and understanding^d:” we may compass sea and land; we may learn all languages, and explore all sciences, and repeat the very Scriptures themselves from beginning to end; and yet never attain true wisdom. If any man will be wise, he must become a fool, in order that he may be wise. The most learned man in the universe can know nothing *savingly* in any other way: and the weakest man in the universe shall know all that is needful for him, if he will but enter in at this door: “God will reveal to babes the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent^e:” and “a wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein^f.”

Can any thing more strongly shew the importance of this precept, than the consideration, that none can remain destitute of true wisdom who obey it, or obtain true wisdom who despise it?

We are aware that some may ask, Are there not many persons learned in the Scriptures, who yet never attained their wisdom in this way? We answer, Either they attained their wisdom in this way, or their wisdom is no other than “the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with God.” We have nothing to do with individuals. The point to be resolved is,

^c Ps. xxv. 14.

^e Matt. xi. 25.

^d Prov. i. 6.

^f Isai. xxxv. 8.

Whether God requires us to become fools in our own estimation, in order that we may be wise in his ? And if he do require it, then shall men become wise in his way, or not at all.

But there is another view in which the importance of this precept will appear, namely, that *if we obey it not, our reason, instead of guiding us aright, will only mislead us more and more, and render us more obstinate in our error.*

The more confident we are respecting the truth of our present views, the more shall we regulate our conduct according to them : and consequently, if they are wrong, we shall wander further and further from the right way, and yet conceit ourselves to be in the path of duty. Moreover, God himself will give such persons up to their own delusions, as a just punishment for the pride of their hearts. The very words following the text are full to this point ; “ He knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain :” and again, “ He taketh the wise in their own craftiness^g.” Let us hear our Lord himself speaking to the Pharisees, who disdained to be taught by him : “ For judgment I am come into this world ; that they who see not, might see ; and that they who see, might be made blind.” And when they answered with indignation, “ What, are we the blind persons you are speaking of ?” he answered, “ If ye were blind, ye should have no sin ; but now ye say, We see ; therefore your sin remaineth^h.”

The language of the Apostle in the first chapter of this epistle, is peculiarly strong and animated ; “ It is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise ? where is the scribe ? where is the disputer of this world ? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this worldⁱ ?” Thus we may ask in reference to all who will not learn in God’s appointed way, What does their wisdom do for them ? Does it bring them to God ? Does it enable them to

^g ver. 19, 20.^h John ix. 39—41.ⁱ 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

overcome the world? Does it disarm death of its sting? Does it inspire them with a hope full of immortality? Does it sanctify them throughout in all their tempers and dispositions, and transform them into the image of the blessed Jesus? We may even ask, Whether, so far from loving to be taught of God themselves, they do not feel an enmity in their hearts against those who are taught of God; and account them fools, whom God declares to be the only wise?

Here then the point appears in its true light. If men will not become fools in their own estimation, they shall be fools indeed: for they shall wander incessantly “in their own deceivings,” and shall “perish at last for lack of knowledge^k.”

We cannot conclude this subject without OBSERVING—

How much it reflects on a fact which has existed in every age of the Church, which yet it is not easy to account for, namely, that few of those who are eminent for learning, are at the same time eminent for spirituality of heart and life.

St. Paul in this very epistle says to the Church at Corinth, “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence^l.” Thus must we say in reference to our times, that not *many* wise, or *many* noble, are found among the despised followers of Jesus. And the reason is, that men will not condescend to be taught of God in the way that God requires: they are “wise in their own conceits:” their wisdom is even a greater bar to their salvation than their lusts: for, their lusts they will condemn, even while they inwardly indulge them: but their wisdom they hold fast, nor will they

^k Hos. iv. 6.

^l 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

part with it, even for "the wisdom that cometh of God^m." Being therefore too proud to learn, they are left in ignorance; and, stumbling at the very threshold of the sanctuary, they never enter within the veil.

Here then let us call to mind the first words of the text: "LET NO MAN DECEIVE HIMSELF." We all, and especially those "who seem wise in this world," are in danger of self-deception. But let us remember that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than menⁿ." Let us therefore "not lean to our own understandings;" but, aware of the weakness and fallibility of our own reason, let us submit ourselves humbly to the teachings of God's word and Spirit.

To this advice it may be objected perhaps, That we promote an enthusiastic dependence on divine impulses; and puff up ignorant persons with spiritual pride; and discourage the pursuit of sound learning.

Let us then be heard in reply to these objections.

In answer to the first we say, that we should indeed promote enthusiasm, if we exhorted any one to follow impulses that were independent of the written word: but if we recommend all persons to regulate their sentiments *solely* by the written word, and to rely on the influences of the Holy Spirit *no further than they accord with that*, then neither we, nor they, are in any danger of enthusiasm, because the sacred oracles are an unalterable standard to which every thought and action may be brought, and by which its quality may be infallibly determined.

With respect to the encouraging of spiritual pride, surely the inculcating of humility is a strange way of promoting pride. Suppose we were to tell men that their own reason is sufficient for every purpose of spiritual instruction; and that they are at liberty to weigh every truth of Scripture in their own balance, and to admit, or alter, or expunge whatever accords with, or opposes, their own sentiments; then indeed there would be some foundation for the objection. But

^m Jam. iii. 17.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 25.

^o Prov. iii. 5.

when we recommend a cheerful submission to the voice of inspiration, and a humble dependence on God's promised aid, we cut up pride by the very roots, and lead men to confess, that all their sufficiency is of God alone. And if any pervert this doctrine to the fostering of their own pride (and what doctrine is there that has not been perverted ?) the fault is not in the doctrine itself, but in those who abuse it : and if an argument from the abuse of a thing be valid, we must then give up the Bible itself ; since every doctrine in it has been more or less abused.

Lastly, as to the discouraging of sound learning, how can that be a consequence of the foregoing statement ? We have not insinuated that worldly wisdom is unnecessary for worldly purposes, but only for the attainment of divine knowledge : and therefore we can no more be said to speak against human wisdom because we deny the necessity of it in order to the attainment of that which is divine, than we could be said to decry divine wisdom, if we should deny that to be necessary in the investigation of human sciences. Nor have we intimated that human wisdom is of little value for the elucidating of the Scriptures ; for most assuredly it is of exceeding great value in this view, especially when used in conjunction with, and in subserviency to, divine wisdom. And lest any one should conceive, that deductions unfavourable to the pursuit of literature should appear to be authorized by this discourse, we declare unequivocally, that it is the duty, the indispensable duty, of all students, whatever be the sphere in which they are afterwards to move, to cultivate human wisdom, and with all diligence to prosecute the work assigned them, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." We do not hesitate to say, that they would be culpable in the highest degree, if they should make religion a pretext for neglecting their Academical studies. We would solemnly exhort them all to remember, that, as in *our* families, so also in *God's* family, every servant best executes *his Master's will*, when he is most *attentive to the duties of his place and station*.

Having thus endeavoured in few words to obviate such objections as were likely to arise, what remains, but that we entreat those who think themselves wise, to become fools in their own sight; and those who feel that they “lack wisdom, to ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and without upbraiding^p.”

^p Jam. i. 5.

MDCCCCXLIX.

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRIVILEGES.

1 Cor. iii. 21—23. *Let no man glory in men. For all things are your's; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

IT is scarcely to be expected, considering the weakness and depravity of our fallen nature, that the Church in any place should be free from dissensions and disputes. If every man who embraced the Gospel were from thenceforth altogether under its influence, nothing but love and harmony would prevail. But, not to mention the insincerity of some, who, like Simon Magus, profess the truth without experiencing any of its sanctifying influence, the hearts of men are not changed all at once, but by a gradual and progressive advancement in the divine life. Hence corruption will be at work, as well as grace; and, whilst the Spirit lusts against the flesh, the flesh will lust against the Spirit, and in some cases prevail against it, to the disturbing and defiling of the Church. So it was even in the apostolic age; and even where Paul himself preached. A party-spirit early prevailed in the Church of Corinth; different parties arraying themselves under different heads; some saying, that they were of Paul, others of Apollos, others of Cephas, and others of Christ^a. To repress these contentions, the Apostle remonstrated with the people on the impropriety of their conduct: and,

^a 1 Cor. i. 12.

having exposed the evil of such a spirit, he now, in conclusion, shews, that to “glory in men” is highly criminal; because of,

I. Our interest in God—

All that God has, belongs to us, if we believe in Christ:

1. His servants are ours—

[They are ours, with all their talents, and with all their labours: the most eminent among them is but “a steward of the mysteries of God,” appointed by God to dispense them to his people; “an earthen vessel, in which treasures” are deposited by him for their use. They are Christ’s servants; and they are ours for his sake^b. Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas were not endowed with their respective powers for their own sake, but for the sake of the Church and of the world; as we are expressly told: When “Christ ascended up on high, he gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, Evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ^c,” so that all to whom they are sent, may consider them as among their treasures, the gifts of God to them for the benefit of their souls.]

2. His creatures are ours—

[The whole “world,” and all that it contains, is ours, if we believe in Christ. The sun is ours to light us by day, and the moon and stars by night. The rain is ours, and the produce of universal nature, as far as is for our good. As to the actual possession of it, we may have but little; but as to the sanctified enjoyment, we have all. St. Paul speaks of himself as often oppressed with want and nakedness: yet, notwithstanding in appearance he had nothing, in reality he “possessed all things^d.” Little as a worldly mind can enter into the idea, it is a fact, that the poor godly man has a richer enjoyment of his pittance, than the most opulent of ungodly men have of all their sumptuous feasts and large estates. To live by faith is a sublimer happiness than to live by sense; because in the cup of one who so lives, there is an ingredient which the other never tasted, and never can taste: “God himself is the portion of his inheritance, and of his cup^e,” whether he have little or much, he enjoys God in it; and therefore he has the best possible use of all sublunary good.]

3. His dispensations are ours—

^b 2 Cor. iv. 5.

^d 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^c Eph. iv. 11, 12.

^e Ps. xvi. 5.

["Life," with all its comforts, belongs to the believer; nor can it ever be taken from him till his appointed time be come. "Death" also is among the number of his possessions. Terrible as it is to the unbeliever, it ceases to be so when once we give ourselves up unfeignedly to Christ as his peculiar people: from that moment its sting is drawn: and every man who can say with truth, "To me to live is Christ," may with the fullest assurance add, "To me to die is gain^f." The pains and sorrows which usually precede death are only so many means of purifying the soul, and of preparing it for its appearance before God: and the final stroke is no other than the opening of the gates of Paradise for the soul's admission to the full possession of its inheritance. If the stroke be more sudden and violent, it may be regarded as the fiery chariot which bore Elijah to the realms of bliss: or, if it be more mild and gradual, it may be viewed as the waggons which Joseph sent to bring his aged father to a participation of all his glory in the land of Egypt. However it may come, it is to the true Christian a termination of all his sorrows, and a consummation of all his joys. "Things present" too, of whatever kind they be, are precisely such as the believer, if he did but see as God seeth, would choose for himself: and "things to come," however involved in impenetrable darkness at the present, are all ordered for his eternal good. To him they are uncertain: but Infinite Wisdom has ordained them all: and though there may be insulated occurrences which in themselves may be evil, they shall all, when taken together, "work for good," to those who love God^g. Yea, for the believer is prepared the future judgment; and for him are reserved all the glories of the eternal world. And, that we may not doubt the truth of these assertions, the affirmation is renewed at the close of this catalogue, "All are yours."]

Before we point out the particular bearing of this part of our text, we will notice the latter part, wherein is stated,

II. God's interest in us—

Here it will be necessary to mark distinctly the drift of the Apostle's argument. He is shewing, that we ought "not to glory in men," that is, not to indulge such partiality for some as would lead us to undervalue others. To evince this, he observes, that "all things are ours;" and that it is absurd to be so over-valuing a minute and comparatively insignificant *part* of our

^f Phil. i. 21.

^g Rom. viii. 28.

possessions, when we ought rather to be rejoicing in *the whole*: and that it is moreover highly criminal to be arranging ourselves under the standard of some favourite preacher, when we should be wholly and entirely given up to God as his exclusive property.

The former of these points we have already considered: the latter now calls for our attention.

We are not to give up ourselves to any man whatever, as though we had an exclusive property in him, or he in us: for,

1. We are Christ's—

[In speaking upon this, we shall not enter into it at large, but shall confine ourselves to the precise view in which we conceive it to have been spoken by the Apostle.

We are *Christ's*, and *not man's*. The minister, who may be the honoured instrument of bringing us to Christ, has no property in us: he is only the servant whom Christ has sent to bring his bride to him. Christ is the Bridegroom; the preacher is only the person who “presents the Bride as a chaste virgin to Him^h:” and this is the precise view in which every convert ought to regard the person to whom the honour of bringing him to Christ is delegated. The bride may feel obligations to the friend who conveys her to the bridegroom; but she does not once think of shewing to him any such partiality as would interfere with the sacred and inalienable rights of her husband. Thus it should be with all who are converted through the instrumentality of men: they should regard those men as mere instruments, or, as St. Paul expresses it, “as ministers by whom they have believed,” and by whom they have received the gifts which the Lord himself, their heavenly Bridegroom, sent to themⁱ.

Let this then be borne in mind: “Ye are Christ's,” wholly, and altogether Christ's. He formed you originally: he redeemed you with his own most precious blood: he called you by his grace: all that you are, and all that you have, is his. You must therefore consider yourselves as his: his exclusive property, in all the powers of your body, and in all the faculties of your soul. Yea, so entirely must your affections be set on him, as to make all creatures dwindle into insignificance before him, eclipsed as stars before the meridian sun.]

2. “Christ is God's”—

[Our affections are not to be so set even on Christ himself, as to forget that he, *as our Mediator*, is only God's servant,

^h 2 Cor. xi. 2.

ⁱ ver. 5.

sent to bring us to God the Father, and to deliver us up to him when the whole work entrusted to him shall be complete. The Lord Jesus Christ is to be considered in a three-fold view; as God, as man, and as the Mediator between God and man. As God, he is equal with the Father: as man, and as Mediator, he is inferior to the Father; as St. Paul has said; "I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man: and the head of Christ is God^k." He is the Father's servant, to redeem both Jews and Gentiles by his own obedience unto death^l — — — In all that he spoke, and in all that he did, he acted agreeably to the commission which he had received from the Father: and all that he suffered was "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God the Father." Whilst this glorious work is going forward, we must look to Christ, in whom all fulness is treasured up for the use of his Church, and "in whom all fulness of the Godhead dwelleth bodily:" but in the last day, when all the elect shall have been gathered in, and every enemy shall have been put under the feet of our victorious Lord, the whole body, with Christ himself at their head, shall be subject unto God the Father, being delivered up to him as the supreme Head of this glorious kingdom, that "God may be all in all^m." As a *mediatorial* kingdom, it has been received from God the Father; and when, as a *mediatorial* kingdom, there shall be no longer any need of the Mediator's office, it shall be given up into the hands of Him from whose counsels it proceeded, and by whose power it was completed.

Seeing then that we, and all the whole Church, are God's exclusive property, we must, from fidelity to him, guard against the smallest disposition to alienate from him any portion of that honour and authority which are due to him alone.]

We will **IMPROVE** the subject,

1. In its negative and more appropriate view—

[We must "not glory in men." It matters little whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, be the object of our preference; the attachment which leads us to set up one above another is altogether carnal. *Four times in as many verses is this conduct characterized as carnalⁿ.* Happy would it be for the Church of God, if this disposition were viewed in its proper light! for there is scarcely a place where more than one minister officiates, but this hateful temper springs up to disturb the union and harmony of the Church. Moreover, as this temper is carnal in itself, so is it injurious to the welfare, as well of those who indulge it, as of all who are affected by it. Wherever it exists, it deprives the person of all the benefit which he might receive

^k 1 Cor. xi. 3.

^l Isai. xlii. 1, 6. and xlix. 1—3, 6.

^m 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

ⁿ ver. 1—4.

from those whom he so ungratefully undervalues: he contributes to excite divisions in the Church of God; and, as far as in him lies, weakens the hands of those ministers, on whom, in comparison of his favourite, he pours contempt. Brethren, let the arguments of the Apostle have their proper weight. The object of your idolatrous regard is given, not to you only, but to the whole Church of God, for whose benefit he is sent forth: and whilst he is sent for others, others also are sent for you: and you are ungrateful to God in so limiting your regards, as not to give a due proportion of them to all who seek your welfare. Besides, you are not to view *them*, so much as *God in them*: for of themselves they are nothing: whoever plants or waters, it is God alone that gives the increase^o. To God then supremely, and to God exclusively, are your affections due: and, if you will set them on any creature, you will “provoke him to jealousy,” and cause him to take away from you, as “Nehushtan,” (*a piece of brass*), the instrument which he had raised up for the salvation of your souls^p.]

2. In its positive and more general view—

[You should glory in God with your whole hearts. Think what reason you have to glory in him: what unspeakable benefits you have received at his hands, and what obligations you have to surrender up yourselves wholly unto him! Who, besides the believer, can take to himself the declarations of our text? Of whom, besides him, can it be said, “All things are yours?” Survey the catalogue, believer, and think whether there be any thing in the whole universe that you can add to it? Should not you then be contented? Should not you be thankful? or rather, should there be any bounds to your joy and gratitude? I ask not whether you be in health or sickness, in wealth or poverty, in joy or sorrow: the state you are in is that which Infinite Wisdom has ordained for your greatest good; and there awaits you, at your departure hence, the immediate and everlasting fruition of God himself. O be joyful in the Lord, all ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard day and night! And, as God is wholly yours, so be ye wholly his, in body and in soul, in time and in eternity.

We cannot however conclude without entreating all to see that these blessings do indeed belong to them. It is to the believer, and to him alone, that they do belong: and we earnestly invite all, first, to believe in Christ as their only Saviour, and, then, to make it evident by their works that they have indeed believed; for, if our character be not clear, we can have but little comfort in the promises to which the saints alone are entitled, and of which they alone will ever receive the final accomplishment — —]

^o ver. 6, 7.

^p 2 Kings xviii. 4.

MDCCCCL.

BELIEVERS ARE CHRIST'S PROPERTY.

1 Cor. iii. 23. *Ye are Christ's.*

TRUE Christians, however poor in this world, are indeed the richest people in the universe. There is not any thing of which they have not the best use and enjoyment. All things temporal, spiritual, and eternal, belong to them: yet they are not so rich in the property they possess, as they are in being themselves the property of another. The Apostle is enumerating in a climax the privileges of Christians; and having said that all things are theirs, he adds, as a more exalted privilege, that they are Christ's. To elucidate this truth, we shall consider,

I. Whose we were—

The whole creation properly belongs to God; but mankind have alienated themselves from him: nor, whatever difference may have been made between us and others by the grace of God, is there any difference between us by nature. As long as we continue unregenerate we belong,

1. To ourselves—

[The natural man disclaims God's authority over him, and thinks himself at liberty to live to himself. This was once the state even of the Apostles themselves^a: nor is there one amongst us who was not once a rebel like unto them. Our understanding, will, and affections, we used as altogether our own. The members of our bodies too we employed wholly in our own service: even in our religious actions we regarded self rather than God^b. With respect to all our talents of time, money, influence, &c. we said, "They are our own, who is Lord over us?"]

2. To the world—

[The world has an entire ascendancy over us by nature. We adopt its maxims, follow its fashions, and obey its dictates: the pleasures, riches, and honours of it are the idols which we worship. What more can be wanting to constitute us its

^a Tit. iii. 3.^b Zech. vii. 6.^c Ps. xii. 4.

vassals^d? Our Lord himself declares, that all such persons are, not merely the friends, but the property, of the world^e.]

3. To Satan—

[Satan rules in all the children of disobedience^f; he leads them captive at his will^g. Hence he is called the god of this world^h: and who amongst us has not fulfilled *his* will? This then manifests us to have been his childrenⁱ; and, if we be not converted by divine grace, it may still be said to us, as it was to the Jews of old, “Ye are of your father, the devil^k.”]

By conversion, however, we are brought back to our rightful Owner,

II. Whose we are—

Christ is the heir and sovereign Lord of all things. Both men and devils are subject to his controul; but believers are his in a more peculiar manner. They are his people^l, his bride^m, his very membersⁿ—

1. By donation from the Father—

[The Father, from eternity, chose a people for himself^o. These he gave to Christ to be redeemed by him^p; and secured them to him by an everlasting covenant^q. To his eternal purpose we must trace the distinction made between them and others^r, and ascribe all our salvation to him alone^s.]

2. By his own purchase—

[Though salvation is freely given to us, it was purchased for us at a most invaluable price. Christ gave his own life a ransom for us: the price he paid was no less than his own blood^t. This is the great subject of praise in heaven^u: nor should it ever be forgotten by us on earth.]

3. By the drawings of the Holy Spirit—

[No man, of himself, would go to Christ for salvation: all who are his, are drawn to him by the Spirit^x. It is the Spirit who quickens and renews our souls: to him alone must we ascribe the power and the glory^y.]

4. By their own voluntary surrender—

^d Rom. vi. 16.

^e 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^k John viii. 44.

ⁿ Eph. v. 30.

^q Ps. lxxxix. 34—36.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^x John vi. 44.

^e John xv. 19.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^l Tit. ii. 14.

^o Eph. i. 4.

^t 1 Pet. i. 19.

^y Zech. iv. 6.

^f Eph. ii. 2.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 8, 10.

^m Rev. xxi. 9.

^p John xvii. 6.

^r 2 Tim. i. 9.

^u Rev. v. 9.

[All Christ's people are made willing to be his^z: they willingly renew their baptismal covenant, and give themselves up to him at his holy table. This they consider as their reasonable service^a: yea, they rejoice in it as their highest privilege. This is the peculiar character of all true Christians^b.]

LEARN hence,

1. What an exalted character the Christian is—

[He is Christ's, he is Christ's property, and "purchased possession." He is so united to Christ, as to be even "a member of his body^c:" yea, he is so entirely one with Christ as to be "one spirit with him^d." Amazing! one would be almost ready to account this blasphemy. But it is altogether the very truth of God. Compare him, in this view, with what he was: how marvellously changed! There are changes in the natural world, which are truly wonderful; from an acorn to an oak; from a chrysalis, immured in its cell, to a butterfly, with all its gaudy plumage: but the Christian far surpasses them: for they had in their very nature the elements of what they afterwards display: whereas the Christian had the very reverse; a carnal and earthly nature, which is changed into one that is heavenly and divine. Methinks, scarcely would Beelzebub himself, if restored to his former state, be a greater monument of grace than he. Brethren, I charge you to keep this in mind. And, if any imagine that such a reflection will generate pride, tell them, that *what you was* is all that you can call *yours*; and that *what you are*, is the gift of sovereign grace, to the praise and glory of God alone.]

2. What inestimable privileges he possesses—

[Is he Christ's? Then Christ acknowledges him as his, and fixes his eye upon him for good, and orders every thing for his eternal welfare. Yes, the Lord Jesus "keeps him even as the apple of his eye," and will suffer neither men nor devils "to pluck him out of his hand." To the Christian the Saviour looks as to the brightest jewel in his crown, and as a trophy, in whom he will to all eternity be glorified. It was in reference to him that the Saviour, in his last, his intercessory, prayer, said, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me^e:" and never will he cease to watch over every one of *them*, till that prayer is answered, and they are enthroned with him in glory, at the right hand of God.]

3. How plain and obvious is his duty—

^z Ps. cx. 3.

^a Rom. xii. 1

^b Jer. l. 5.

^c Eph. v. 30.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^e John xvii. 24.

[Are you Christ's? Then for him you must live; and every faculty you possess, whether of soul or body, must be improved for him. Your whole life must be a comment on those words of the Psalmist, "Depart from me, ye wicked; I will keep the commandments of my God." Having obtained this stupendous, this inconceivably exalted honour, you must "walk worthy of your *high calling*;" or, rather I should say, of *Him who hath called you*, yea, "worthy of the Lord himself unto all pleasing." There should be no bounds to your desire after holiness, no limit to your efforts. You should desire to be "pure as Christ himself is pure," and "holy as your Father which is in heaven is holy." This is what the Lord Jesus expects at your hands^f, and what your relation to him imperatively demands. Seeing that "you are not your own, but bought with a price, it is your bounden duty to glorify him with your body and your spirit which are his^g."]]

^f Tit. ii. 14.

^g 1 Cor. vi. 20.

MDCCCCLI.

MINISTERS, THE LORD'S STEWARDS.

1 Cor. iv. 1. 2. *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

THE apostolic Churches were not so blameless as we are apt to imagine. Many evils obtained among them; and not in a few insulated individuals only, but in the great mass of the people. The Church at Corinth was peculiarly faulty: many and great evils obtained among them: dissension and division in particular, were fomented among them: and the very diversity of gifts which were exercised among them, instead of being an occasion of more exalted piety, was made a source of discord. The people had their favourite preachers, under whom they ranged themselves as partisans and followers; one being of Paul, another of Apollos, another of Cephas; and another of Christ, as having heard and enjoyed his personal ministrations. To allay this spirit, St. Paul teaches them what account to make of all their teachers, and what to look for at their hands: not flattery, as heads

of parties; but fidelity, as stewards of their great Lord and Master.

Let us here see,

I. In what light people are to view their ministers—

Ministers come not in their own name, but as ordained of God for the benefit of the Church. They are to be viewed,

1. As ministers of Christ—

[They are sent by Christ. They come not of themselves, but as commissioned by him. It is his message which they bring; his will that they perform. By them it is that he speaks to men. As earthly kings are represented by their ambassadors, and speak by them in foreign courts, so the Lord Jesus Christ himself speaks by his ministers: they stand in his stead: they speak in his name: their word is not their own, but his; and must be received, "not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."]

2. As stewards of the mysteries of God—

[They are not merely servants or ministers, but servants of a peculiar class. The whole Church is one great family; and they are appointed as "stewards," to "give to every one his portion in due season." To them "the mysteries of God" are more especially committed, that they may dispense them to all, according to their respective necessities; giving "milk to babes, and strong meat to those who are of full age." The whole of God's revelation is full of mysteries, which, in due season, they are to unfold: but that which they are chiefly to make known, is the stupendous mystery of redemption. They are to shew, as occasion may require, the need there was of redemption; the means by which it is wrought, even by the incarnation and death of God's only dear Son; and the way in which it is applied to men, by the mighty operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul — — — It is not necessary that they should be always insisting on one particular topic: the subject comprehends an immense range; and every part of it must be brought forward in its turn: but the one great mystery must be always kept in view; and the dispensing of it must ever be considered as the appropriate office of the ministers of Christ — — —]

This being their true character and designation, it will easily appear,

II. In what way ministers are to conduct themselves towards their people—

A steward in an household must be faithful to his charge : and so must a minister be in the Church of God : he must be faithful,

1. To his Master—

[He is to receive instructions daily from his Master, and to carry them into effect to the utmost of his power. He must never be doing his own will, or following his own way : he must “in no respect seek his own things, but invariably the things of Jesus Christ.” He must so act, as if the eye of his Master were immediately upon him ; and so that he may be able to give a good account of his stewardship, whensoever he shall be called into his Master’s presence — — — He must never be swayed by any thing but his Master’s will : there must be no vacillation in his conduct, as arising from carnal hopes or fears ; nor any negligence, as arising from sloth. What his Master has appointed, he must do : and “whatever his hand findeth to do, he must do it with all his might.”]

2. To his fellow-servants—

[He must make a due inquiry into their state and circumstances, in order that he may know what to apportion to each, in a way either of work or sustenance. Having his eye on all, he must deal out to them severally that measure of approbation or displeasure, which may be a sure criterion and earnest of the award which will be assigned them at the coming of their Lord. He is never to aim at “pleasing them, except for their good to edification :” I say, he must speak and act, at all times, “not as pleasing men, but God, that trieth the hearts.” He must indeed “speak the truth in love ;” but the truth he must speak at all times, “commending himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” He must “never prophesy smooth things ;” but “reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine ;” “doing nothing by partiality, and never preferring one before another.” The express command of God to him is, “He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat^a ?” The word which he is entrusted to dispense must be in his mouth “as a fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces^b.” He must consider his own soul as at stake : and must so “declare the whole counsel of God, as to be pure from the blood of all men,” and, at all events, to “deliver his own soul ;” that, if any have perished under his ministry, he may himself at least be approved of his God.]

^a Jer. xxiii. 28.

^b Jer. xxiii. 29.

ADDRESS—

1. Be thankful for the privileges which you enjoy—

[You have, I hope I may say, a faithful ministry. But you need to be cautioned against the error which obtained in the Corinthian Church. You know, that wherever there are more ministers than one, there is apt to arise an undue partiality for one above another: and this sometimes verges on an idolatrous attachment on the one part, and a contemptuous indifference on the other. But the Apostle tells us, that this is a very reprehensible carnality. For, granting that you find one more profitable to your soul than another, "what is any man, but a minister by whom you believed, *even as the Lord gave to every man?*" Look through men to God. All of them are "earthen vessels, and the treasure they dispense is God's:" if you look to man, God will withhold his blessing from you: but if you look simply to him, he will, by one as well as by another of his faithful servants, comfort and enrich your souls.]

2. Be faithful, on your part, in making a due improvement of them—

[If faithfulness be required on our part, so is it also on yours. You must come to the ordinances with a real disposition and desire to "hear what the Lord God will say concerning you." You must have your minds open to conviction, and "receive with meekness every word you hear, that it may be an engrafted word, effectual to save your souls." You must not be offended with the faithfulness of your minister; but consider Almighty God himself as speaking to you by him. Then may you expect from God those blessings which your souls need, and a happy meeting with your ministers in the realms of bliss.]

MDCCCCLII.

PAUL'S INDIFFERENCE TO MEN'S JUDGMENT.

1 Cor. iv. 3—5. *With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

THE ministers of Christ are generally either unduly exalted, or undeservedly depreciated, by those

around them; but they should discharge their duties with fidelity, without any regard to the opinions of men, and approve themselves to Him who will judge them righteously in the last day—

I. The tribunal to which Paul referred his character—

He was *not* concerned about *man's* judgment—

[By some he was looked up to as the head of a party^a; by others he was deemed unworthy to live^b; but he knew that men's judgment would continue only for *a day*^c: he was therefore alike indifferent to their censure or applause.]

He could *not* wholly depend even upon *his own* judgment—

[He did not know that he lived in any allowed sin; yet he was aware that, through the deceitfulness of sin and of his own heart, he might be led to form too favourable an estimate of his own state: he knew that God might discern much iniquity where we see none^d; he therefore could not venture too confidently to trust even to the testimony of his own conscience.]

He committed himself *rather* to the unerring judgment of *God*—

[He did not indeed hope for an acquittal on the ground of innocence, or expect a reward as due to him on the footing of strict justice; but he relied on God's equity as tempered with mercy, and willingly left himself to the righteous disposal of his Judge.]

II. The tribunal to which we must also refer ours—

God has appointed a day wherein to judge the world—

[He has constituted the Lord Jesus the Judge of quick and dead. And in due season he will summon the whole universe to his tribunal. Then will he bring into judgment, not the actions only, but the inmost thoughts and desires, of the whole world. Men judge of actions only, and of those actions principally which have respect to the welfare of the community in which they live. They care little about the state of men's souls before God. But God notices the inmost recesses of our hearts. "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, (of which men can take no cognizance;) and will

^a 1 Cor. iii. 4.

^c This is intimated in the original.

^b ver. 13.

^d Luke ix. 55.

make manifest the counsels of men's hearts," and make the very designs and purposes of men the ground of his dealings with them to all eternity. He will notice what we have been *as creatures* — — — what *as sinners* — — — what *as redeemed sinners* — — — The very habit of our minds under all these characters will be brought before him; and, according as *that* has been conformed, or contrary, to his revealed word, will be his sentence of condemnation or approval in that day.]

To that period therefore we must all look, and for it we must all prepare—

[As by the written word we must all be judged, we should study it with all diligence, in order that we both know and execute God's holy will. As for the world's standard of religion, we must not regard it: nor must we regard the approbation or censure which it assigns to men in accordance with its own erroneous views. But to God's judgment we must look forward with the deepest solicitude, labouring if by any means we may approve ourselves to him, and "have praise of him." To what purpose will it be to have monumental inscriptions in our favour, when God has sealed our condemnation, and loaded us with his merited displeasure? Or what effect will the censures of men produce on our minds, when God has passed a sentence of approbation upon us, and seated us with himself on thrones of glory? Methinks that laudatory word, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," will richly repay all the obloquy that man can cast upon us, and all the pain that he could ever inflict.

Then live, my brethren, in expectation of that day, and in continual preparation for it. Mind not what man approves or disapproves, in comparison of what God commands: and be as attentive to the motions and desires of your hearts as to your outward acts. "If you seek to please man, you cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ." You must therefore "not please men, but God who trieth our hearts." And let me entreat you *not to defer* this surrender of yourselves to God. Think what is now the mind of thousands, who, having "sought the praise of man rather than the honour that cometh of God," are now reaping the bitter fruits of their folly: and whatever the whole world may either say or do, (for you must "expect to be persecuted by them if you will live godly in Christ Jesus,") "be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, assured that at last your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

MDCCCCLIII.

GOD TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN EVERY THING.

1 Cor. iv. 7. *Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?*

IF there are advantages derived from education, there are also disadvantages not unfrequently attached to it; inasmuch as habit forms, as it were, a second nature; and often both indisposes us to see what is good, and disqualifies us to a great extent for the prosecution of it. The Corinthian Christians, whilst in their unconverted state, had been habituated to much evil, both intellectual and moral. From the wealth that abounded in their city, and the vicious courses that were there pursued, and particularly from the idolatrous regard shewn there to the leaders of different sects, they were but ill-disposed towards the humbling doctrines of the Gospel, and but ill-fitted for the self-denying habits to which it called them. We wonder not, therefore, that they brought on themselves heavier censures than any other of the apostolic Churches: for, in truth, all things considered, their piety seems to have been, in many respects, very low and questionable. The particular fault blamed in the passage before us was, their contentious disposition to exalt one teacher above another, and their readiness to range themselves under different heads or parties in the Church. The Apostle reprov'd their conduct with the utmost delicacy; transferring to himself and his friend Apollos the evils of which he complained; lest, by mentioning the names of others, he should provoke their hostility, and defeat his own ends.

His reproof may be fitly applied,

I. To those who glory in others—

[Amongst the Corinthian converts, some preferred one preacher, and some another: and, not content with exalting each his own favourite, they poured contempt upon those who were of a different sentiment, and thus produced sad divisions

in the Church. The same fault obtains more or less in the Church, wherever the Gospel is preached: and men justify their partiality upon the ground of their favourite's superior endowments, or on the ground of the benefits derived from him. But this supposes that the object of their attachment has something of his own, which may serve as a ground of boasting. But "what has any man, which he has not received" as a free gift from God? Supposing him to be possessed of gifts, have they not been conferred upon him by "God; who dispenses to men according to his own sovereign will" and pleasure; and, whatever the particular operations be, himself "worketh all in all"^a? Or, supposing him to be made pre-eminently useful in converting souls to God, is it by any power of his own that he has thus prevailed? Can any man open the eyes of the blind, or unstop the ears of the deaf, or determine whom he will convert to Christ? Paul himself could not effect these things. Had the conversion of souls been left to his disposal, he would have conferred that benefit on all: whereas, in every place, the great majority rejected his word, and were enraged by it almost to madness. To glory then in any persons, as though they possessed these talents or powers independently of God, is as absurd as it would be to glory in a sword which had effected the slaughter of many enemies. Every one sees that it is not the sword which has effected any thing: all that it has effected was done by the hand that wielded it: and the person so using it might, if it had pleased him, have taken any other sword as well as that. This is what God himself said, in answer to the vauntings of Sennacherib: "Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it"^b? True it was, that the Assyrian monarch had subdued many kingdoms: but he erred in supposing that it had been done by his own power. It was God who had made use of him, for the accomplishing of his own purposes; and it was not in the power of the proud boaster to go an hair's breadth beyond the commission he had received. So, whatever a man *has*, he has it from "God, who is the Giver of every good and perfect gift"^c; and whatever he *does*, it is not *he* that does it, but *God*, who does it by him: and to God alone must be given the glory, which, through our ignorance and folly, we are but too apt to ascribe to man.]

But the text may also be very fitly applied,

II. To those who glory in themselves—

[If we have any particular endowments, whether of body or mind, we are apt to arrogate something to ourselves, as if

^a 1 Cor. xii. 6, 11.

^b Isai. x. 15.

^c Jam. i. 17.

we had ourselves been the authors of our own excellencies. But such a conceit is most offensive to Almighty God. For “who is it that has distinguished us, or made us to differ from others?” Suppose we have the highest attainments; for which of them are we not indebted to our God? We will suppose that we have light in our understandings: was it not “the Spirit of God who opened our eyes^d,” and “guided us into his truth?” Suppose that we possess decision in our wills: is it not God who “has made us willing in the day of his power^e?” Suppose we are blessed with success in our endeavours: is it not “God who has ordained it for us, and wrought all our works in us^f?” How, then, can we take to ourselves the glory, which so evidently belongs to God alone? When a fawning multitude applauded Herod as speaking like a God, he accepted the compliment; and, by laying the flattering unction to his soul, provoked God to give him up to worms, which from that moment began to prey upon his vitals^g. And we also shall incense our God against us to our destruction, if we take honour to ourselves of aught that we possess, and withhold from God the honour due unto his name. Let this, then, be an acknowledged principle within us, that, whatever eminence we possess above our brethren, “by the grace of God we are what we are;” and to Him must be given the absolute and undivided praise.]

IN CONCLUSION,

1. I will reply to an objector—

[A person may ask, in reference to our first view of this subject, ‘Am I to entertain no preference for a man who has been the means of awakening, sanctifying, and saving my soul? Does not St. Paul say, in this very chapter, “Though ye have ten thousand instructors, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you, through the Gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me^h?”’ I answer, We may have a peculiar love to those to whom we are so pre-eminently indebted: but we must never so exalt one, as to despise another; and never so love any man, as to forget, for a moment, that he is only an instrument in God’s hands, or that the glory of all is due to God alone.

Again, it may be asked, ‘Have I not used means which others have neglected; and obtained, in the use of means, that which has been withheld from others on account of their neglect?’ To this I readily reply, Your statement is true and just: but your inference from it is altogether erroneous. You have not, as you imagine, any ground for self-preference or

^d Eph. i. 17, 18.

^e Ps. cx. 3.

^f Isai. xxvi. 12.

^g Acts xii. 21—23.

^h ver. 15, 16.

self-complacency on this account: for it was "God alone who gave you both to will and to do, of his good pleasureⁱ." To draw the exact line between Divine agency and the freedom of the will, is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to such an ignorant creature as man: but so far as is necessary for practical purposes, it is easy. Suppose we say, that whatever comes within the range of your *physical* powers you may do: but to do it *in a spiritual manner*, and *for spiritual ends*, is beyond your reach: God alone can enable you to do *that*: you are indeed responsible to God for not using the powers which you have; and to him you must give account of your abuse of them: but, if you succeed in any thing that is good, you must ascribe that thing to God, as his workmanship; and say, "Not unto me, O Lord, not unto me, but unto thy name be the praise:" for "His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever."]

2. I will turn the reproof into a fund of rich encouragement—

[Must it be said even to an Apostle, "Who made thee to differ? and what hast thou which thou hast not received?" It may with equal truth be said to the most insignificant of men, What shall you not receive, if you are willing to accept it at God's hands, and to give him the glory of it? Verily, you need not envy any, if only you will cry unto your God. From your present selves, and from the ungodly that are around you, you shall differ: nor shall any thing be wanting unto you, if only you will wait on God in the exercise of prayer and faith. But take care that you pride not yourselves in any of his gifts; for as sure as ever you are "lifted up with pride, you will fall into the condemnation of the devil." The more God magnifies his grace upon you, the more must you abase yourselves before him, and give him the glory due unto his name.]

ⁱ Phil. ii. 13.

MDCCCCLIV.

PAUL'S MEEKNESS.

1 Cor. iv. 12, 13. *Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.*

AS there is a wide difference between the characters of the wicked and the righteous, so there are strong

marks of discrimination between those who are truly pious, and those who have taken up a profession of religion without having felt its transforming efficacy. In too many there remains a proud, contentious spirit, amidst all their pretensions to piety: but in the upright Christian there is a meek, patient, and benevolent disposition, which will shew itself in the most trying circumstances, and afford a decisive evidence of his sincerity. Of the former description were those teachers, who, in order to gain over to themselves a party in the Corinthian Church, introduced among them contentions and divisions. But to these the Apostle's conduct forms a striking contrast: and though he doubtless was peculiarly eminent in his attainments, we may see in him what every Christian, according to the measure of his grace, will surely practise.

We shall take occasion from his words to shew,

I. The treatment which every Christian meets with from an ungodly world—

The people of God have in every age been despised by the world—

[It was the common complaint of all the Prophets^a, and Apostles^b, and of Christ himself^c, that they were objects of hatred and contempt to all around them. We also are taught to expect the very same treatment at the hands of ungodly men^d. We shall be “defamed” behind our backs, and “reviled” to our face: nor will our enemies be satisfied with injuring us merely by their words; they will also “persecute” us by acts of open hostility^e: yea, they will account us as the very scum of the earth, and as execrable wretches that are fit only to be sacrificed to devils, to appease their wrath in a time of public calamity^f.]

Strange as this may seem, it may be easily accounted for—

^a David, Ps. xxv. 19. and lvi. 5, 6. Jeremiah, Jer. xviii. 18. and Lam. iii. 62. In reference to *all* of them, see Acts vii. 52.

^b 1 Cor. iv. 9.

^c John vii. 7. and xv. 24, 25.

^d Matt. x. 22, 24, 25.

^e Matt. v. 11. and 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^f This is the precise idea suggested in the text; and it refers to a custom which obtained in some heathen countries, and was probably well known at Corinth. See Doddridge on the place.

[Christians are not thus detested because they are worse than others (for they are "the excellent of the earth," "more excellent than any of their neighbours^g,") but because they exhibit a light which forces men to see their own wickedness^h. To this we must ascribe Cain's murder of his brotherⁱ, and the universal opposition which the seed of the serpent make to the seed of the woman^k. If we were of the world, the world would love its own: but because we are chosen out of the world, and walk contrary to its sinful customs, it does, and will, hate us even unto death^l.]

Doubtless such treatment is hard to be borne; but the Christian distinguishes himself by,

II. His behaviour under it—

There are two things that characterize a true Christian under all his trials:

1. A passive meekness—

[The saints are men of like passions with others; but, through grace, they are enabled to repress the workings of corruption, and to regulate their tempers by the word of God. Instead of giving loose to a vindictive spirit, they bear with silent resignation the injuries that are inflicted on them, or, if they speak, it is only in words of gentle "entreaty." David, in his conduct towards Shimei^m and Saulⁿ, exemplifies in both these points of view the Christian's duty, and the Christian's experience. There are indeed occasions whereon, through inadvertence or the power of temptation, they may be overcome^o: but, on the whole, they will "possess their souls in patience^p," and "shew all meekness unto all men^q." Rather than provoke contention they will endure the wrong that is done towards them^r, and, forbearing to notice it in complaint to man^s, will commit themselves into the hands of a righteous God^t.]

2. An active benevolence—

[The natural man, under injuries received, is mindful only of his own troubles: but the Christian feels a concern for the

^g Ps. xvi. 3. Prov. xii. 26.

^h Matt. v. 10. Luke vi. 22. John iii. 19, 20.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 12. ^k Gen. iii. 15. Gal. iv. 29. Ps. xxxviii. 20.

^l John xv. 18—20. ^m 2 Sam. xvi. 5—11.

ⁿ 1 Sam. xxvi. 8, 9, 18—20, 24.

^o *e. g.* Moses, Numb. xx. 10. Ps. cvi. 32, 33. and Paul, Acts xxiii. 3—5.

^p Luke xxi. 19.

^q Tit. iii. 2.

^r 1 Cor. vi. 7.

^s Ps. xxxviii. 12—14. ^t 1 Pet. iv. 19.

souls of those who injure him. He is grieved for them^u; and would be willing to sustain any temporal evils whatever, if by means of his own sufferings he might bring his enemies to a better mind, and avert from them God's heavy displeasure^x. He will even bless his enemies, and pray for them^y, and rendering to them good for evil, he will heap coals of fire, as it were, upon their heads, in order to melt them into love^z. He will contend indeed; but he will use no weapon except that of love: and in this warfare he will fight strenuously, till, instead of being overcome of evil, he overcomes evil with good^a.]

INFER—

1. How different is the judgment of God from that of sinful men!

[Men hate and despise the righteous^b; and would pour out their blood as water, if God should withdraw his restraints from them^c. But God declares that, instead of their being unfit to live in the world, the world itself is not worthy of them^d; that their blood is precious in his sight^e; that whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of *his* eye^f; and that it were better for any man to be cast into the sea with a millstone tied about his neck, than that he should offend one of his little ones^g. Moreover the time is fast approaching, when this difference of sentiment shall be made to appear before the whole assembled universe, to the everlasting comfort of his afflicted people, and the eternal confusion of his enemies^h. Let us then learn to "take up our cross daily," and to follow the example of our blessed Lordⁱ; so shall we approve ourselves his true Disciples^k, and obtain a glorious reward in the day of judgment^l.]

2. How superior are the operations of divine grace to all the suggestions of human wisdom, or all the efforts of human power!

[Philosophy never could devise means to eradicate a vindictive spirit from the heart: on the contrary, it extolled revenge as a virtue, and regarded the temper that is exhibited in the text, as meanness and pusillanimity. If men had even endeavoured to exercise such a disposition as Paul's, they would have failed in the attempt, because unassisted nature is wholly incompetent to such a work. But what cannot the grace of God effect? It will turn a lion into a lamb; or rather, it will

^u Ps. xxxv. 7, 11—17. ^x Exod. xxxii. 32. Rom. ix. 1—3.

^y Luke vi. 27, 28. Rom. xii. 14. ^z Rom. xii. 17, 19, 20.

^a Rom. xii. 21.

^b Ps. xxxvii. 32. Isai. lix. 15.

^c Ps. lxxix. 2—4.

^d Heb. xi. 38.

^e Ps. cxvi. 15.

^f Zech. ii. 8.

^g Matt. xviii. 6.

^h Isai. lxvi. 5.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 21, 23.

^k Matt. xvi. 24, 25.

^l Matt. v. 12.

transform the vilest of the human race into the image of our incarnate God. Let us then follow the example of the saints and martyrs that have gone before us^m. Let us exert ourselves in dependence on the Lord Jesus, and not doubt but that "his grace shall be sufficient for us." Then shall our very enemies be constrained to "glorify God in usⁿ," and to "confess that God is with us of a truth^o."]

^m Jam. v. 10.

ⁿ Gal. i. 24.

^o 1 Cor. xiv. 25.

MDCCCCLV.

AN IMPORTANT ALTERNATIVE.

1 Cor. iv. 21. *What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?*

AT Corinth, religion was at a very low ebb. Great were the abuses which obtained there, even amongst the professed followers of Christ. Yet to those very persons the Christian Church is much indebted, for the displays which they occasioned the Apostle Paul to make of the Christian character in its highest perfection. How perversely they acted towards him, the Apostle tells us: "Now ye are full; now ye are rich; ye have reigned as kings without us^a:" and, at the same time that they arrogated so much to themselves, they poured the utmost contempt on him: "We are fools for Christ's sake; but ye are wise in Christ: we are weak, but ye are strong: ye are honourable, but we are despised^b." But how did that blessed man conduct himself under these circumstances? He tells them: "Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat." And then, with most lovely delicacy, he adds, "I write not these things to shame you; but, as my beloved sons, I warn you^c." Still it was necessary that he should correct what was amiss in them; and therefore he sent Timothy to rectify these abuses for the present, engaging that he himself would shortly come and put every thing in order. But the proud leaders of that Church said, he would never

^a ver. 8, 10.

^b ver. 12.

^c ver. 14.

dare to obtrude himself among them. He, however, assured them that he *would* come to them, and with power too, if they constrained him to do so: and he submitted it, as it were, to their option to determine in what way he should come to them; whether of needful severity, or of unmixed love.

Now the Apostles had, occasionally at least, a power to inflict temporal judgments; as Peter did on Ananias; and as Paul did on Elymas the sorcerer: and to this there may be some reference in the menace before us. But every minister of God has such a measure of authority vested in him over the people of his charge, that he may with propriety address them in the language of my text; “Shall I come unto you with a rod; or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?”

That I may make a suitable improvement of these words, I will,

I. Set before you the diversified duties of a Christian minister—

A minister is not merely “a steward of the mysteries of God^d,” to dispense to every member of God’s family his portion in due season; but

He is, as a father over them, to exert authority—

[Even a young minister, if there be occasion, is to “reprove” both sin and error^e; yea, to “rebuke with all authority^f,” and even “sharply” too, rather than not effect the reformation he desires^g. In this exercise of authority, he must seek “the edification, and not the destruction” of the offender^h: but he must rather proceed to the utter excision of a corrupt member, than suffer the whole body to sustain irreparable injuryⁱ. Nor is he to be influenced in this matter either by fear or love. If the offender be as powerful as Ahab or as Herod, yet must Elijah reprove the one, and John the other: nor must the true Levite, the faithful minister, know even his own parents or children, so as to withhold from them the needful admonition^k. Eli is, in this respect, a warning to all ministers^l, to “know no man after the flesh.”]

^d ver. 1.

^e 1 Tim. v. 20.

^f Tit. ii. 15.

^g Tit. i. 13.

^h 2 Cor. xiii. 10.

ⁱ Gal. v. 12.

^k Deut. xxxiii. 9.

^l 1 Sam. ii. 27—36.

At the same time, he must act under the influence of love—

[Even in the use of “the rod,” a father is actuated by love: but where it is possible to effect his purpose without it, he would rather cast it away, and conduct himself only in a spirit of affectionate endearment. St. Paul, towards this very Church, *and at a time when they were actually setting him at defiance*, writes, “Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ^m.” And this was his constant habit. He could appeal to his converts, that “*as a nursing-mother*,” he had cherished them; being so affectionately desirous of them, as to be willing to impart to them, not the Gospel of God only, but also his own soul, because they were dear unto him: and he further appeals to them, that, during his whole intercourse with them, he had “exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of them, *as a father doth his children*, that they would walk worthy of God, who had called them to his kingdom and gloryⁿ.” If there were any of whom he stood in doubt, he “changed his voice towards them, and even *travailed in birth* with them, till Christ should be formed in them^o.” This is the true pattern for a Christian minister: he must have courage and firmness to use “the rod,” where necessary; but in his soul he should affect nothing but “love, and a spirit of meekness.”]

Having stated the diversified duties of a minister, I will,

II. Address myself to the discharge of them—

St. Paul gave to the Corinthian Church their *option between the two alternatives*, and left them to determine in what way he should proceed with them. Now, as your stated minister, I am necessitated to “come unto you” from Sabbath to Sabbath: and I beg you to consider,

1. What is the treatment which you *desire*?

[Too many are utterly indifferent about the ministry of the word; and are equally unaffected, whether we come in a way of reproof or of consolation — — — Yet, methinks, it is not altogether thus with you: but, in answer to the question, “What will ye?” ye are ready to say, ‘Come in the way which you judge most suited to my necessities.’

Let me then proceed to ask,]

2. What is the treatment which you *deserve*?

^m 2 Cor. x. 1, 2. ⁿ 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8, 11, 12. ^o Gal. iv. 19, 20.

[What is your conduct, in your collective capacity, *as a Church*? Are there among you “debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults?” Dear brethren, if this be the case, and “I find you such as I would not, you can expect only that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: and that, whilst I bewail your condition,” I shall only administer such correctives as the occasion may require^p. *As to individuals*, of course, except in extreme cases, nothing of a personal nature can be spoken, but only in a way of private intercourse. But, beloved, I wish you to examine, whether you are “profiting by the word preached,” and whether you “make that profiting to appear.” I wish you to examine, whether there be in you any secret declension from God; or whether you are advancing steadily in your Christian course, and “daily growing up into Christ in all things as your living Head^q.” If this be the case, we shall greatly rejoice: for, as St. Paul said, “I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord^r,” and as St. John said, “I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in truth^s,” so I, brethren, according to the grace given unto me, would have all my own feelings and interests swallowed up in your welfare. If you are but “babes, I would feed you with milk: if you are grown to full age, I would administer strong meat” for your nourishment. In a word, I would endeavour to adapt my ministrations to your necessities, in accordance with the direction given me; “Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, and be patient towards all men^t.” The time is shortly coming, when both you and I must give account to God; I, of my ministrations; and you, of your improvement of them: and the Lord grant, that in that day I may be found to have discharged my duties with fidelity! and may you be my crown of rejoicing to all eternity! yea, of all of you, without exception, may I then be able to say, “Ye are our glory and joy^u!”]

^p 2 Cor. xii. 20, 21. ^q Eph. iv. 15. ^r 1 Thess. iii. 8.

^s 3 John, ver. 4. ^t 1 Thess. v. 14. ^u 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

MDCCCCLVI.

SIN A MALIGNANT LEAVEN.

1 Cor. v. 6. *Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*

THAT ungodly men may glory in their shame, may easily be conceived: but that persons professing godliness should ever be led to do so, can scarcely

be imagined. Yet, such is the force of habit, that it may blind the eyes of persons who are not otherwise destitute of discernment; and may lead them to vindicate proceedings, which, on a calmer view, they would judge deserving of utter abhorrence. The Corinthians, in their heathen state, had been proverbially addicted to lewdness of every kind. But, behold, a man after having embraced Christianity, had become guilty of incest: and when the Apostle protested against this, as an act of gross impiety, the elders of the Church at Corinth espoused the cause of the incestuous man, and refused to execute upon him the censure which his crime demanded. This conduct the Apostle justly reproved, both as detestable in itself, and as likely to prove exceedingly injurious to the whole Church: "Your glorying is not good: know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

Now in this expostulation we may see,

I. The malignant nature of sin—

The operations and effects of leaven are well known in every family: and it will serve, therefore, to illustrate, in the clearest manner, the nature of sin. It is,

1. Corrupting—

[The purest dough that was ever made has no sooner a portion of leaven blended with it, than it ferments, and becomes sour. And such was the effect of sin upon the soul of our first parent. Adam, when he came out of his Creator's hands, was formed in the perfect image of his God: not an evil propensity of any kind was found in him. But behold him as soon as sin entered into his soul: instantly he became so alienated from his God, that he fled from him, and strove to hide himself amongst the trees of the garden: and when interrogated by God respecting the act which he had committed, he cast the blame of it upon God himself. The sin which he had committed was as small as any that could be conceived; it was not a breach of morals, properly so called; but only a transgression of a positive precept, which rendered that sinful, which, if not particularly prohibited, would have been perfectly innocent: yet did this small leaven so leaven his whole soul, that he became altogether corrupt; and the image of God was

changed, as we shall see presently, almost into the image of an incarnate fiend — — —]

2. Spreading—

[However large the mass of dough may be, the smallest leaven will leaven it throughout. And thus did sin operate on the soul of Adam. His understanding was rendered dark; his will, perverse; his affections, sensual; his conscience, treacherous and partial. Not a member of his body, or a faculty of his soul, retained its original purity: but, as the prophet says of the Jewish people, “The whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint: from the sole of the foot even to the head there was no soundness in him; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.” God’s own testimony, respecting man in his fallen state, is, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually” — — —]

3. Assimilating—

[The whole of the dough is by leaven changed, and will produce the same change on any other mass with which it may come in contact. So “Adam begat a son in *his own* fallen likeness;” and all who have proceeded from him inherit the very same depravity which sin had produced in him. In every age, and every place, human nature is the same: there is, in all, the same alienation from God, and the same idolatrous regard to self. Education may make a difference in the *habits* of men; but in their *propensities* there is no difference. There is, in all, the same “filthiness, both of flesh and spirit;” the same love to sensual indulgence; and the same disposition to pride, envy, malice, wrath, and all uncharitableness. In every living man, whether civilized or savage, there is that “wisdom only which is from beneath, which is earthly, sensual, devilish^a.”]

The appeal which the Apostle makes on this subject leads us to consider,

II. The importance of having just conceptions respecting it—

It is no curious speculation that is here suggested; but a fact, that is confirmed by universal experience, and the knowledge of which is of great importance,

1. For the preservation of the Church—

[The Church of Christ is in continual danger, both from error and corruption: and, in reference to both of these, the

^a Jam. iii. 15.

Apostle gave the same salutary warning. The Galatian Church were in danger of seduction by Judaizing teachers: indeed, even Barnabas himself had been seduced by Peter's dissimulation. To them, therefore, St. Paul suggested this salutary admonition, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump^b:" and in numberless instances has the truth of that saying been evinced. Aaron's calf became an object of worship to all Israel: and Jeroboam's calves perverted all the tribes that were submitted to his government; and continued to pervert them, till they were all destroyed. The little leaven that, from time to time, was found amongst holy men in the primitive Church, wrought gradually to the production of all the abominations that have for centuries prevailed in the Church of Rome. And in the great majority of Protestant Churches has one error or another crept in, till all their members have become infected with it, and vital godliness been banished from their souls.

In the passage before us, the warning refers more particularly to morals; and intimates, what experience so fully proves, that "evil communications will corrupt good manners." To illustrate this amongst the ungodly world is unnecessary, because it is too obvious to have escaped the observation of any. But amongst the Apostles themselves we may behold it on several occasions. Let a little leaven of pride^c, of covetousness^d, of self-confidence^e, or cowardice^f, be brought amongst them, and they all immediately catch its baneful influence, and betray the weakness of their better principles. And wherever the Gospel is preached in its purity, the same awful tendency is seen and felt: one person or another indulges a proud, conceited, or contentious spirit; and "his word will soon eat as doth a canker^g."

2. For the preservation of our own souls—

[The recollection of this fact will prove extremely serviceable to every child of God. For who is there that has not felt the bitter consequences of omitting to resist the very first incursion of an evil thought? It was but a glance which David caught of Bathsheba; and we all know what sad effects it produced, to the dishonour of God, and well nigh to the destruction of his own soul. "The man after God's own heart" became, in a degree that was scarcely ever exceeded, a man after the very heart of Beelzebub himself. And if this idea teaches us to resist the first motions of sin, how much more strongly does it guard us against the harbouring of any

^b Gal. v. 9.

^c Matt. xx. 21, 24—27.

^d John xii. 3—6. compared with Matt. xxvi. 8.

^e Matt. xxvi. 35.

^f Matt. xxvi. 56.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 17.

evil in the heart ! How affectingly does it warn us to “pluck out the right eye, and to cut off the right hand or foot,” lest our whole body be contaminated, and be consigned, as utterly irrecoverable, to the flames of hell^h ! Nor does it less forcibly instruct us to guard against the means of evil, and the temptations to it. A man in the midst of many combustibles will dread the approach of fire. And who that considers how soon a fire may be kindled within him, and burn even to the lowest hell, will needlessly venture himself into those scenes of temptation, where every thing around him has a direct tendency to inflame and consume his soul ? Who, that considers “how great a matter a little fire kindlethⁱ,” will be indifferent respecting the company with which he mixes, the conversation in which he engages, the books he reads, the thoughts he indulges in his heart ? Verily, if we would retain a purity of heart and life, we must never forget that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” If we pray to God not to lead us into temptation, we must take care that we run not needlessly into it ourselves.]

What now shall I SAY ? Beloved brethren,

1. “Purge out,” with all imaginable care, “the leaven that is within you”—

[This is St. Paul’s own improvement of the subject^k. The Jews, at their passover, were wont to search every corner of their houses with candles, in order to get rid of any leaven that might be found there ; that so they might keep the feast with unleavened bread, according to the commandment. And is “Christ our Passover sacrificed for us,” and shall not we exercise the same care to “keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth ?” I call you, then, to the utmost possible vigilance in relation to this matter. Guard against every thing that is evil, whether in principle or practice ; that so you may not be an occasion of corrupting others, and “may yourselves be preserved blameless unto the kingdom of your God.”]

2. Endeavour to get your souls altogether leavened by divine grace—

[There is a leaven that proceeds from God himself, that is intended to operate through the whole world, and to assimilate every human being to the very image of his God^l. Entreat of God to impregnate your souls with that. See to it, that its operation be progressive, through all your faculties

^h Mark ix. 43—48.

^k ver. 7, 8.

ⁱ Jam. iii. 5.

^l Matt. xiii. 33.

and powers: and never rest till it has had its perfect work within you, and "changed you into your Saviour's image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord^m."]

^m 2 Cor. iii. 18.

MDCCCCLVII.

CHRIST OUR PASSOVER.

1 Cor. v. 7, 8. *Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

CHRISTIANITY affords us not only new grounds of hope, but also new motives to action, yea, the only motives that are capable of giving an uniform direction to our conduct. The arguments derived from the excellency of virtue, the fitness of things, or even the certainty of rewards and punishments, never could produce any effects comparable to those, which have been wrought by the exhibition of a crucified Saviour. St. Paul, well knowing the efficacy of this topic, proposed it on all occasions. If he would enforce the duties of love, beneficence, or zeal, the love of Christ was both his pattern, and his plea. Thus, in the passage before us, having enjoined the Corinthian Church to excommunicate their incestuous member, he reminds them of the sacrifice of Christ; and, in allusion to their accustomed method of eating the Paschal Lamb, exhorts them to celebrate the Christian passover with becoming purity, both as to outward discipline, and inward affection. In considering his words we shall notice,

I. The representation here given of Christ—

Christ is here said to have been "sacrificed for us"—

[Sacrifices were appointed of God from the very fall of Adam as means of conciliating his favour, and expiating any offences which had been committed against him. The creatures sacrificed were put to death, and were always considered as dying in the place of the offender, who, by his transgression,

had forfeited his life to divine justice. Precisely in this way has Christ been sacrificed *for us*: “he died, the just for the unjust;” he was put to death not merely for our good, but in our stead: and in his sufferings we may behold a figurative representation of what we had merited by our transgressions.]

In this view he is called “our Passover”—

[The paschal lamb was sacrificed in a peculiar manner, and on a most extraordinary occasion. God had determined to destroy the Egyptian first-born, but to spare his own people: He appointed the Jews to kill a lamb, to sprinkle its blood upon the door-posts, and to eat its flesh roasted with fire, taking also with it some bitter herbs^a. Upon their due observation of this ordinance God promised to interpose for their deliverance, and not to suffer the destroyer to involve so much as one of them in the common ruin. Thus are we obnoxious to the wrath that is coming upon the ungodly world: but Jesus, that spotless Lamb, has, on the very same month, day, and hour, that the passover was first killed, and in the midst of most inconceivable agonies both of body and soul, yet without the breaking of a bone, been slain for us^b; and we are by faith to sprinkle our hearts with his precious blood: we are also to feed upon his body and blood; and, in so doing, are as sure of the divine protection as if we were already in heaven. Though “thousands should fall beside us, and ten thousand at our right hand, the sword of the avenger should not come nigh us.”]

That we may rightly improve this glorious truth, let us consider,

II. The exhortation grounded upon it—

While the occasion of Christ’s death affords us ground for the deepest humiliation, the deliverance effected by it should ever be remembered with joy—

[The Jews were commanded to “keep” an annual “feast” in commemoration of their deliverance from the destroying angel^c. And, as their feast was a memorial of the mercies they had received, so is ours to be, to the latest generations. Indeed our whole lives should be kept as a holy solemnity, because we are daily and hourly experiencing the saving virtue of the Redeemer’s blood.]

The peculiar manner in which the Jews were to

^a Exod. xii. 3--9.

^b Exod. xii. 46. with John xix. 33, 36.

^c Such a feast is the Lord’s Supper to us: as they fed on the Paschal Lamb, so do we on the body and blood of Christ, represented to us in the bread and wine.

observe their passover, was a figurative representation of the manner in which ours also should be observed—

[The Jews were enjoined on pain of death to forbear the use of leaven, and to put it out of their houses for seven days^d: and they were to eat the lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Thus is the leaven of sin to be purged out of our hearts with the greatest care; and while we feed by faith on the spotless Lamb of God, we must partake also of the bitter herbs of repentance and “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” As for the “old leaven” of Gentile uncleanness, or of Jewish pride and malignity, it must be wholly put away: the scrupulosity with which the Jews searched and swept their houses to purge out all leaven, is an admirable pattern for our imitation. A sincere desire to know the will of God, a full and unreserved determination to do it, together with a corresponding meekness in our spirits, purity in our thoughts, sincerity in our words, and integrity in our actions—this, this is the Christian temper; this is the frame in which our whole lives should be kept as a feast unto the Lord. Moreover as the Jews were to eat the passover in haste, with their shoes on their feet, and their loins girt, so must we be in a continual readiness to go towards the promised land.]

From this most instructive subject we may OBSERVE—

1. How plain is the way of salvation!—

[Ask of every one that was saved that night, To what he was indebted for his preservation? Would there be two opinions throughout the whole nation of Israel? Would there be so much as one that would ascribe it to his own wisdom, or power, or goodness? No, not one. All without exception would say, I owe it to the blood of the Paschal Lamb sprinkled upon my door-posts. *That* was God's ordinance: and by the observance of *that alone* I was kept from the sword of the destroying angel, who was constrained to *pass over* every house where that blood was seen. Let us then see ourselves doomed to perish on account of our sins; but, through the application of the blood of Christ to our souls, preserved from death: and we have a perfect view of the Gospel salvation. Nothing can be conceived more simple or more intelligible even to the meanest capacity.]

2. How beautiful is the Christian life!—

[It is one continued feast; a feast upon the body and blood of our great Sacrifice^e. True, it must be eaten “with bitter herbs.” But who is there amongst us who does not need

^d Exod. xii. 15, 19.

^e John vi. 53—57.

to have his joys tempered with penitential sorrow? It must be eaten too “with unleavened bread:” for if there be in us any allowed guile, we can never hope to escape the wrath of God^f. We must eat it also with our loins girt, and our staff in our hands, ready every moment to proceed on our journey to the promised land. Compare this state with that of those who were to be left behind in Egypt, wholly ignorant of these high privileges, and altogether destitute of these exalted hopes: truly of the Christian, whoever he be, it may well be said, “Happy art thou, O Israel; who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord^g?”]

3. How certain and glorious is the effect of faith!—

[The whole that was prescribed to Israel was one act of faith. The killing of the sacrifice, the sprinkling of its blood, the feeding on its flesh, the uniting with it the bitter herbs of penitence, and the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, and the habitual readiness to depart, were all, I say, one act of faith. And of its success we are fully informed. Of the whole nation not so much as one was lost. If any one had refused to comply with the appointed ordinance, he would have perished: but in all Israel not so much as one was slain. So, beloved, it shall be with you, if you live by faith upon the Son of God. Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than the least or meanest of true believers shall perish. Be assured of this; and you shall have even now a foretaste of the blessedness that awaits you in the worlds above.]

^f Ps. xxxii. 2.

^g Deut. xxxiii. 29.

MDCCCCLVIII.

GOD'S MERCY TO THE VILEST SINNERS.

1 Cor. vi. 9—11. *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*

AS long as men retain within them the seeds of their original corruption, so long they will be liable to fall into sin, and consequently they will need to be instigated by every motive that can be adduced,

to persevere in the ways of holiness. Now there are scarcely any stronger incentives to obedience, than a recollection of the inseparable connexion which there is between sin and misery; and a view of the unspeakable mercies which we ourselves have received at God's hands. It was by these considerations that St. Paul urged the Corinthians to abstain from some practices in which they were engaged, and from others to which they were particularly exposed. They had gone to law with each other even in the Gentile courts, instead of settling their disputes by arbitration amongst themselves. It is probable too that some among them thought but lightly of the sin of fornication; since the close of the chapter is wholly occupied with that subject. His address to them was well adapted to the occasion; in that it appealed at once to their fears and to their gratitude; and thus secured the influence of their ingenuous feelings, as well as of those which were of a more selfish nature.

His words will lead us to shew,

I. The awful condition of the ungodly—

Those who live in sin will have no part in the inheritance of the saints. Though some of the sins specified in this black catalogue are such as cannot be mentioned with delicacy, or thought of but with horror, yet far the greater part are as common in Christian lands as among the heathen themselves: but, by whatever name men call themselves, they who live in such sins “shall never inherit the kingdom of God.” The manner in which this declaration is made, calls for our particular attention. Mark,

1. The Appeal—

[The Apostle *appeals* to our own consciences; “Know ye not this?” However ignorant ye be, are ye not well assured in your own minds, that persons living, and dying, in the commission of any of these sins, must perish? Does not Scripture, does not reason, does not conscience tell you, that there must be a difference put between the just and unjust in the day of judgment? — — —]

2. The Caution—

[The Apostle next cautions us against self-deception. We are apt to extenuate these crimes, and to conceal their enormity by some specious name. Fornication and adultery are youthful indiscretions: drunkenness is conviviality: covetousness and extortion are prudence, and the common licence of trade. Thieving is confined to one species of dishonesty; whilst a defrauding of the revenue, and a neglect of paying one's debts, and many other kinds of theft, are practised without remorse. As for "reviling," the conversation of many consists of little else than speaking against their neighbour; and especially when they have received from him any real or fancied injury: yet *that* is considered as nothing more than a proper token of their contempt for such conduct as they disapprove. And a soft, easy, indolent, "effeminate" manner of life, such as indicates an aversion to do any thing or suffer any thing for Christ, is reputed innocent, as though a Christian had nothing to do but to please himself. Moreover, if men be free from the grosser *acts* of sin, they pay no attention to the *dispositions* of their minds; though, in reality, dispositions are as hateful to God, and as much reprobated in the text, as overt acts. But, however they may hide from their own eyes their guilt and danger, God's decree is irreversible, and his threatened vengeance shall assuredly be executed upon them.]

But, notwithstanding the danger to which sinners are exposed, the text informs us of,

II. The blessed state to which they may yet be exalted by the Gospel—

Many of the Corinthians had, while in their heathen state, been guilty of all the abominations mentioned in the text. But at their conversion,

1. They were received into the Christian covenant—

[The word "washed" seems to refer to their initiation into the Christian Church by the ordinance of baptism; and therefore imports, that they had been admitted into the Christian covenant. We indeed, at our conversion, are not to repeat the rite of baptism; because the baptism administered to us in our infancy was in all respects as available for us as circumcision was for the Jews; yet, since we are brought only into the *outward* bond of the covenant in our baptism, we need to be made partakers of its saving benefits: and, however abandoned we may have been in our unregenerate state, we shall be received to a full participation of its blessings, as soon as ever we repent and believe in Christ.]

2. "They were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus"—

[Justification includes not merely a remission of sins, but a being dealt with by God as innocent persons, or, in other words, an exaltation to eternal happiness and glory. Now this the Corinthians enjoyed as soon as they embraced the Gospel. They were not left to expect it after death: it was already vouchsafed unto them. For the sake of Christ all their sins were blotted out as a morning cloud. And we also, as soon as we "believe in him, shall, for his sake, be justified from all things," however abominable our past lives may have been, and however much we may have deserved to be abhorred both by God and man.]

3. "They were sanctified by the Spirit of our God"—

[The Apostle, speaking in the fulness of his heart, did not observe any particular order in the arrangement of his words; and therefore no conclusion is to be drawn from the order of them: for, in strictness of speech, our sanctification does not precede, but follows, and flows from, our justification. But what a triumph of Divine grace was here! these people, who had been sunk beneath the very beasts by their iniquities, were renewed by the Holy Ghost, and transformed into the image of their God. Surely then none of us need despair! Whatever we have been, or whatever we may yet be, we still may look to that Divine Agent, who will renew and sanctify us wholly, provided we seek his operations in the name, and for the sake, of Jesus Christ.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are yet living in sin—

[Is there a person here, who, whether openly or in secret, gives way to uncleanness? Thou "shalt never inherit the kingdom of God." Is there a person here who corresponds in any respect with those described in the text? Does not thy conscience tell thee, Thou must perish? If thou hast bribed, or silenced thy conscience, "deceive not thyself;" for God's word shall stand, whether thou believe it or not. Hear this, thou whoremonger, thou adulterer, &c. &c. In the name of Almighty God I declare, Thou shalt never inherit the kingdom of God, unless thou repent, and believe in Christ. Let me entreat thee seriously to consider thy guilt and danger, while there is a way of escape yet opened to thee by the Gospel.]

2. To those who have experienced pardon and sanctification by the Gospel—

[It will be always profitable for you to bear in mind what you once were: for though your actions may not have been so abominable as those referred to in the text, none of you have any right to cast a stone at others; seeing that the seeds of all evils are in your own hearts, and nothing but the preventing grace of God has made you to differ from your more abandoned neighbour. What cause have you then to magnify and adore that grace which has so distinguished you; and to "love much, from a sense of having had so much forgiven!"

Well also may a recollection of the many talents that have been forgiven you, incline you readily to forgive the pence that may be owing to you by an offending brother. It is particularly in this view that the text is introduced by the Apostle, and in this view it certainly ought to be improved. Get but a just sense of the mercies vouchsafed to you in the pardon of your sins by the blood of Jesus, and the renovation of your natures by the Holy Ghost, and you will esteem nothing too much to do for God, and no forbearance too great to exercise towards the most unworthy of mankind.]

MDCCCCLIX.

THE DUTY OF DEVOTING OURSELVES TO GOD.

1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. *What? know ye not that ye are not your own? for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

THE word of God reveals to us many things which unenlightened reason could never have discovered. This is particularly manifest with respect to the offices of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. These were "mysteries hid in God from the foundation of the world;" but they are supposed to be well known to every true Christian; indeed they form the basis of the Christian's hope; and they at the same time afford him his strongest motives to obedience. St. Paul was dissuading the Corinthians from the sin of fornication: he reminded them therefore of the principles which they professed. We wave what he says respecting the Spirit dwelling in them, and shall confine ourselves to the words of our text.

We shall consider,

I. The principle which the Apostle assumes—

All men naturally think they are “their own”—

[Men employ their time and faculties nearly as they please^a. They think themselves at liberty so to do^b. Hence the language of their hearts is declared by the Psalmist^c—Their conduct, if not their speech, resembles that of Pharaoh^d—]

But no man is or can be his own—

[Men may be free from any human yoke; but no man is or can be independent of God. This is a principle even of natural religion.]

This every Christian is supposed to know—

[The manner in which the Apostle assumes this principle is remarkable. His question is a direct appeal to our consciences; he takes it for granted that no one can be ignorant of that truth; he expresses surprise that such a truth should be forgotten.]

Indeed this principle cannot admit a doubt. This appears from considering,

II. The argument he urges in support of it—

God, as our *Creator*, has an unalienable right over us—

[We possess not a faculty of body or mind but from him^e. We cannot exercise one faculty but by virtue derived from him^f. We therefore can be no other than his property.]

But he has also *redeemed* us—

[We were in bondage to the curse of the law^g, but God has redeemed us from this miserable state^h. He paid no less a price for us than the blood of his own Sonⁱ.]

By this he has acquired a further right over us—

[The great end of redemption was “that we might live unto God.” The Scriptures speak of redemption in this light^k. Thus our obligation to devote ourselves unreservedly to God is greatly increased and confirmed by it. If God complain of us for requiting with neglect his paternal care^l, how much more may he, for our contempt of redeeming love!]

The principle being thus established, we proceed to consider,

^a Isai. liii. 6.

^b Jer. xxiii. 17.

^c Ps. xii. 4.

^d Exod. v. 2.

^e 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^f 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^g Gal. iii. 10.

^h Gal. iii. 13.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

^k 1 Pet. iii. 18. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. John xvii. 19.

^l Isai. i. 2, 3.

III. The exhortation he founds upon it—

“Our body and our spirit are entirely God’s” property. We are bound therefore to glorify him with both to the uttermost—

[We cannot indeed add any thing to God’s glory^m. God however esteems himself glorified by our servicesⁿ. There are many ways in which we may glorify him daily. A devotedness to him is justly called “our reasonable service^o.”]

Let the exhortation then have its due effect—

[God claims every one of us as his own. Let us not then live as though we were at our own disposal; let us adopt the resolution of Joshua^p—let us yield to him all the members of our bodies^q; let us glorify him with every faculty of our souls^r; let us never disjoin what was so connected in Paul’s experience^s; let us seek to have that inspired declaration fulfilled in us^t—]

INFERENCES—

We may see from hence,

1. What lamentable ignorance prevails in the Christian world!

[Many are daily violating their baptismal vows without remorse. Though educated in the faith of Christ, they give not themselves to him. This may well be a matter of surprise to thoughtful minds. It justly excited the feelings of David^u. Let us beg of God to convince us of the evil of such conduct; let us turn from it with self-loathing and self-abhorrence^x.]

2. How reasonable and delightful is the Christian’s duty!

[What more reasonable than that we should be his who bought us? And what so delightful as to be ever glorifying God? This constitutes the felicity of the perfected saints and angels. We should never be unhappy *here* if we abounded more in this duty. Let us know, then, and enjoy our inestimable privilege. To have honoured God here, will be our crown hereafter.]

^m Ps. xvi. 2.

ⁿ Ps. l. 23.

^o Rom. xii. 1.

^p Josh. xxiv. 15.

^q Rom. vi. 13.

^r Ps. ciii. 1.

^s Acts xxvii. 23.

^t Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

^u Ps. cxix. 53.

^x Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

MDCCCCLX.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY RELIGION.

1 Cor. vii. 16. *What knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?*

WE, who live under laws generally known and acknowledged, have little conception what difficulties arose to the Church in the apostolic age, from the licentious habits of many upon their first conversion to Christianity. Those who had been brought up as heathens saw no evil in concubinage: and those who had been educated as Jews imagined that they were still at liberty to put away those with whom they had been united in the bonds of matrimony. In some respects, the very habits and ordinances of pious men amongst the Jews tended to confirm the Christian converts in their errors. They were not aware, that some things were *tolerated* among the Jews, and, on some particular occasions, even enjoined, which yet were positively *forbidden* by the Christian code. It will be remembered, that, after the Babylonish Captivity, many of the Jews who had returned to Canaan "took wives of the people of the land," and thereby greatly provoked the Lord to anger. On that occasion, Ezra commanded all of them to put away their wives and children^a. Hence, when persons had been converted to Christianity, a doubt arose in their minds, whether they were not bound, or at least authorised, to separate themselves from their unbelieving partners. This case had been stated to the Apostle, for his opinion respecting it: and he, by God's special command, forbade any such measure. Even if a person, being a Christian, had so far forgot his duty to God as to connect himself in marriage with an unconverted person, he was not at liberty to divorce her from him; but he must exert himself to the uttermost to effect the conversion of his unbelieving partner. This was the line prescribed equally to all,

^a Ezra ix. 2—4. and x. 2, 10, 11, 44.

whether men or women : and agreeably to that rule they were all bound to conduct themselves, whatever difficulties might lie in their way.

The words thus explained will lead me to shew you,

I. The duty of persons in wedded life—

Persons once brought into a marriage union should from thenceforth live, as it were, altogether for each other, even as the Lord Jesus Christ is incessantly occupied in promoting the welfare of his Church : and, as the Church is ever seeking to advance the honour of her divine Head, each should seek continually the other's salvation—

[If there be a oneness of sentiment between the parties, this will be easy. But whatever diversity of sentiment there may be between them, the duty is still the same ; and it should be performed with unremitting diligence. It is not to be supposed that such unions will often be found, as existed frequently in the primitive Church, when, through the conversion of one party to the Christian faith, light and darkness, Christ and Belial, a believer and an infidel, were joined together. But between Christians, as converted to Christ, or yet in a state of unregeneracy, there is scarcely a less difference than between persons of different religions. And *this* difference exists to a great extent wherever the Gospel is preached in sincerity and truth ; and the duty of each party is then precisely the same as that which bound the converts from Judaism or idolatry to their unconverted partners. The utmost possible forbearance was to be exercised towards the person who was yet under the power of heathen darkness or Jewish superstition : and so should it be towards one who is yet in bondage to the world ; and who, perhaps, is irritated and enraged at the change that has been wrought in the mind of his dearest companion. Great allowance should be made for him. We must not expect him to see with our eyes : and, if he express grief or vexation at our conduct, we must consider how *we* should have felt, if the change had been wrought in him, and we had yet continued under our former blindness. Grateful to God for the mercy vouchsafed to us, we should implore the same in his behalf : yea, we should “ labour earnestly in prayer for him night and day,” that God may open *his* eyes, and impart to him the salvation which *we* have experienced. We should remember, that the change has been wrought in *us* ; and that therefore there is, so to speak, a

ground for complaint on his side, who still retains his former sentiments and habits: and we must be prepared to endure unkindness from him, on whom we have inflicted so deep a wound. We must possess our souls in patience; and labour, by meekness and by love, to win him, whose heart has never submitted to the preached word^b.]

To this the most distant prospect of success should be a sufficient inducement—

[Whatever the state of our partner may be, God is able to effect a change: “there is nothing impossible with him:” he can “quicken the dead,” and “call forth into existence that which had no being.” And great beyond conception is the power of prayer. The person that continues instant in prayer is almost sure to succeed at last. And what if success should be granted, even though it were after years of suffering and of supplication? would not *that* be a very abundant recompence for all? Yes: years of labour would be well repaid by such an issue. And how knowest thou, O husband, or O wife, whether this shall not be the issue of thy prayers? How knowest thou, whether thou shalt not be the happy instrument of saving thine unbelieving partner? Surely a mere possibility of such an event should be sufficient to call forth our utmost endeavours; and we should with patient perseverance hold on to the end, “instructing in meekness him that opposes us, if God peradventure may give him repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and he may at last recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he has been led captive at his will^c.”]

But the questions need not be restricted to those in wedded life: they shew us equally,

II. The duty of persons, in whatever relation they may stand to each other—

Manifold are the relations of civil and social life; and in all of them, the same concern for the salvation of others becomes us. Such is our duty,

1. In our own families—

[A person at the head of a family should consider all under his roof as committed to his care, to be brought up for God. It was said by God himself, with special approbation, respecting Abraham, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord^d.” The same attention will he approve in

^b 1 Pet. iii. 1.

^c 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

^d Gen. xviii. 19.

us also: and the more we know of the evil of the heart, and of the danger of dying in an unconverted state, the more earnest should we be in the performance of this duty. And what if we be successful in one single instance; will it not richly repay all the labour we can bestow on this good work? Even as it respects this present life, what a bond of union exists between a man and his *spiritual* offspring! What sweet counsel they take with each other, when going to the house of God as friends, or in the more retired intercourse of domestic life! But, if we take eternity into the account, what shall we then say? Think of saving an immortal soul! What an honour! what a joy! O cease not, any of you, from this good work; but go on steadily, with much patience, much forbearance, much earnestness, if by any means you may be honoured with “turning one soul from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”]

2. In the Church of God—

[The Church is one great family; amongst whom there is yet very ample occasion for mutual forbearance, and for mutual aid. All who believe in Christ are, in fact, one body; and every member should take a deep interest in the welfare of the whole. It is to be lamented, that, even in the apostolic age, there were divisions and bitter animosities amongst those who ought to have been united in the bonds of brotherly affection: and so it is at this time. Many, because of a diversity of sentiment on some points, and frequently on points of inferior importance, are really separated from one another more widely than from the unconverted world. But such a disposition ill becomes the family of which Christ is the Head. We should all have but one object in view; and labour with incessant care so to watch over each other: and we should “become all things to all men, if by any means we may save some^e” — — —]

3. In the world at large—

[Wherever there is an immortal soul, there should be an object of our care and love. We should not ask, in reference to any human being, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” We all have a debt of love, which we should be paying to every child of man. Especially should we be concerned for the salvation of their souls, and be using all the means in our power to advance it. The unconverted heathen, the unbelieving Jew, and the scoffing infidel, should be objects of our tenderest compassion, as should also be the careless and ungodly all around us; and, both by secret prayer and benevolent efforts,

^e 1 Cor. ix. 20—22.

of whatever kind, we should seek their salvation. And what if we be the means of saving one single soul? Verily I say to you, that we shall cause all heaven to rejoice: for "there is joy among the angels in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth." Know ye this, brethren; "know, that whoso converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins^f." Shall not such a prospect stimulate us to exertion? You will say, you are not sure to succeed in your efforts. True: but are you sure that you shall *not* succeed? "How knowest thou, O man," what God shall be pleased to effect by thy means? Thou mayest be among the weakest of the people; yet that should not discourage thee: for God delights to honour those who honour him; and "he will perfect his own strength in thy weakness." But, at all events, if we should fail in doing good to others, shall none accrue to ourselves? This cannot be: for "God will reward every man according to his own labour^g;" and he who "watered others, shall be watered also himself."]

^f Jam. v. 19, 20.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 8.

MDCCCCLXI.

ABIDING IN OUR CALLING.

1 Cor. vii. 24. *Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.*

THE state of the Church, at the first introduction of Christianity, was full of embarrassment: the Jewish converts knew not how to conduct themselves in reference to the Mosaic law, which was now abrogated; nor did the Gentile converts find it easy to submit to a moral discipline so different from that to which they had been hitherto accustomed, and so strict as that which Christianity imposed. The union also of Jews and Gentiles in the same society, like that of two contending elements, was a source of continual discord. The persecutions too, which each were called to endure, tended yet further to make their path of duty more intricate; so that not even the wisdom and authority of St. Paul himself were sufficient to adjust the difficulties which arose, without a special appeal to the whole college of Apostles, and

the public sanction of their united authority. The epistle before us gives a great insight into the state of things as existing at that day, and shews how much there was to be rectified in the whole Christian Church. But, not to notice the various evils which prevailed in the Church at large, we will fix our attention on some difficulties which the Corinthians had submitted to the Apostle for his advice. Many, who had been converted in the married state, had to encounter the most painful opposition from their unconverted relatives: the husband being filled with resentment against his wife, and the wife against her husband. Hence arose a question, whether it was not expedient for the two to separate, rather than, by continued feuds, to embitter each other's life. On this subject they wrote to him for his advice. The Jewish and Gentile converts also consulted him how they might best satisfy their own minds under their respective circumstances, and most approve themselves to that God whom they desired to serve. Doubts also arose amongst believing servants, whether they ought not, at any risk, to leave the masters who were hostile to the religion they had embraced. To each of these the Apostle gives an appropriate answer: and then lays down as a general rule, that "whereinsoever any man was called, he should not think of leaving his calling, but should abide therein with God." This rule he twice prescribes, within the space of a few verses^a: and therefore we may well regard it as deserving the most attentive consideration.

For the elucidation of the whole subject, I shall endeavour to mark,

I. The feelings which the Gospel is apt, under peculiar circumstances, to engender—

There is, as we all know, a great difference between the states and conditions of different men—

[The Jews, for instance, were, for the space of fifteen hundred years, distinguished above all the rest of the human race, by the light of revelation, and by ordinances of divine

^a ver. 20, 24.

appointment: and, from the apostolic age, the followers of Christ have, in like manner, been honoured as the depositories of the Gospel, whereby alone we are instructed how to obtain favour with God, and secure to ourselves the possession of an eternal inheritance. If we compare the state of Mahometans or Pagans with that of the Christian Church, we shall see how greatly we are favoured; and what reason we have to adore our God for that light which we enjoy, and of which they have no just conception.

And as there is a difference in men with respect to *religious privileges*, so also is there in relation to their *civil advantages*. Some are rich, and possessed of extensive authority; whilst others are poor, and altogether subjected to the will of their superiors. Some enjoy the blessings of a liberal education, whereby their knowledge is expanded and enlarged; whilst others are shut up in ignorance, and, by a continued necessity for bodily labour, are precluded from all opportunity of enriching their minds by intellectual pursuits. Some enjoy, without labour, all that the world can give; whilst others are scarcely able, even by the most unwearied exertions, to obtain what is necessary for the support of themselves and families; or perhaps even to get employment for their industry, or to subsist at all, except by a degrading supply of eleemosynary aid.]

Now, to the natural man, these distinctions are an occasion of much murmuring and complaint—

[Men see that such a state of things exists; and they feel the inconveniences arising from it: and, inasmuch as it arises, for the most part, neither from any exalted merit in the higher classes, nor any peculiar demerit in the lower, they view it with an envious eye and a repining heart. They do not understand what necessity there is for such a state of things, nor how connected it is, for the most part, with civilization and the liberal arts. They are not aware, that if the whole system were subverted, and all men were reduced to perfect equality, the same inequality would soon arise, and greater evils ensue than those which had been already experienced. The disparity alone is felt; and no wonder if, in an inconsiderate mind, it create a measure of uneasiness and discontent.]

For a season, even the Gospel itself, instead of removing this feeling, is calculated rather to engender it—

[Doubtless, *in itself*, the Gospel is fitted only to reconcile the mind to every dispensation of providence: but, till it has gained a due ascendant over us, it may, through the corruption of our nature, operate rather as affording an additional ground

for discontent: for it brings eternity to view: and a person, once beginning to feel the value of his soul and the importance of eternity, contemplates with more than common interest the advantages which men of learning and of leisure have, for the acquisition of knowledge, and the advancement of their eternal interests. A bond-slave, for instance, whose every hour is devoted to some laborious task, and to whom the very means of grace are denied by a cruel master, what prospect, it may be said, has *he* of attaining salvation, in comparison of one whose wealth and independence place within his reach every assistance that he can stand in need of? Can we wonder if a person so circumstanced murmur and repine at his hard lot? Such, no doubt, was the state of many, both of wives and servants, whom the Apostle speaks of in the preceding context. And hence arose the necessity for the encouragement which he affords the bond-slave, saying, "If thou art called, being a servant, care not for it:" and for the direction which, with an emphatical repetition, he gives to all; "Whereinsoever any man is called, let him therein abide with God."]

A juster view of the Gospel, therefore, will lead us to contemplate,

II. The conduct which it ought rather to inspire—

A relinquishment of our calling is not that which the Gospel recommends. A continuance in it is rather enjoined, whether to those who are unhappily yoked to an unbelieving partner, or to those who are subjected even to the most oppressive bondage: for though it admits, that liberty, if tendered, is rather to be preferred, it still requires that no unlawful effort be made to obtain it. In whatever state a man be called to the knowledge of the truth, he should abide therein with God; that is,

1. In submission to his will—

[Every state should be regarded as appointed us of God. Whatever be the means which are instrumental to the fixing of our lot, still it must be considered as disposed altogether by Him who "doeth all things after the counsel of his own will." There was not a tribe, no, nor an individual, in all Israel, whose inheritance was not appointed of the Lord. And so it is in every age, and every place. Now, we know that God orders every thing with perfect wisdom: and, whether we see the reasons of his dispensations or not, he will shew, in due season, that he has done all things well. He acts in reference to mankind at large, as he has done in reference to our natural

body. He has given us many members ; and has endued every member with faculties suited to its state, and proper for the discharge of its peculiar office. All the parts have not the powers of the eye or of the ear : but some have a higher, and others a lower, office assigned to them, so as most to conduce to the good of the whole. And thus it is in the body politic ; the whole of which is benefited by a just distribution of powers and offices assigned to the different members : nor has any member any just occasion to complain of its situation or use, since all are necessary to the perfection of the whole, and all subservient to the good of the whole. The collective welfare, rather than its own individual use, should be the ambition and the happiness of every part.]

2. In dependence on his grace—

[In every station we may serve the Lord. Doubtless it is more difficult to maintain our integrity in some situations than in others ; but yet, whatever be our trials, “ the grace of Christ is sufficient for us ;” and God has promised that we shall have no temptation without a way to escape, or ability to bear it^b.” We should, therefore, not sit down in despair, as though our calling were such as that God could not be served in it. If we cannot do all that we could wish in a way of active service, we may yet bear and sustain his will : and passive obedience is no less acceptable to him than active ; yea, it is in some respects the more acceptable, because it is the more difficult. A man may shut us up in prison, and prevent our intercourse with men : but can he intercept our flight to heaven, or prevent the descent of God into our souls ? Can he rob us of the communications of grace and peace, which our heavenly Father has bestowed ? No : we may laugh him to scorn, and defy his utmost efforts. The utmost that he can do is, to kill the body : he cannot, for a moment, touch the soul, or obstruct its happiness. “ If God be for us, who can be against us ?” Only let God be our refuge and our hope, and no situation under heaven can prevent us from discharging the very offices which he has assigned us, or from drinking deeply of the “ streams which refresh and gladden the whole city of God.”]

3. In endeavours to promote his glory—

[As God may be served by all, so may he be glorified in all. It matters not what the particular service be to which we are called, if only we endeavour to honour him by it. The bond-slave honours him as much by a meek submission to his will, as the greatest potentate on earth does by the most

^b 1 Cor. x. 13.

diffusive benevolence. It is not in great things only that God is glorified: for, as he has told us, "whether we eat or drink, to do all to his glory," we may be sure that, even in the most common acts that can be performed, this blessed end may be attained. Aim, then, at this: keep your eye steadily fixed on this, under every circumstance of life: seek "that in all things God may be glorified, through Jesus Christ:" and if this end be attained, you need not care whether it be by action or suffering, "by life or death."]

A QUESTION, however, of great importance here occurs: *Are we forbidden, under any circumstances, to change our calling?*

[I apprehend not. The Apostle's rule is general, not universal. Were the rule absolutely universal, no converted person could marry, or assume the pastoral office, or perform many other duties, which must, without such a change, be totally neglected. But no man should change *merely on account of the difficulties that attend his present calling*. We should guard exceedingly against fickleness of mind, and a cowardly desertion of our post on account of the trials which we meet with in the way of duty. Who ever sustained heavier conflicts than the Apostle Paul? Yet did he not account them any reason for abandoning his apostolic office. We should rise to the occasion, whatever the occasion be; and be ready, when dissuaded or discouraged, to reply, "None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy." There may, however, be occasions whereon we may be "moved by the Holy Ghost" to give up a calling, that is purely temporal, for one that is spiritual: yet, in reference to such calls, I confess that the greatest jealousy over ourselves is desirable, and the utmost watchfulness that we deceive not our own souls. That many have taken upon themselves the ministerial office, who were never truly called to it, I have no doubt: but that many have relinquished other callings, and devoted themselves to this, to the great advantage of God's Church, is certain. To lay down rules by which every case should be determined, and every difficulty solved, would be impracticable, because of the infinite diversity of circumstances which must be taken into consideration in every different case: but, in every prospect of change, recourse should be add to prayer, for God's special direction: nor should we move, till we have some evidence that the pillar of the cloud is moving before us. One thing, under all circumstances, is necessary: whether we change our calling or not, we should be careful to "abide with God." We must walk with him; we must go in and out before him; we must approve ourselves to him; we must bear in mind the solemn

account which we must shortly give to him at the judgment-seat of Christ. Whilst we look to him in such a mind as this, we need not fear but that he will lead us aright, and prosper us in our ways, and conduct us in safety to his heavenly kingdom.]

MDCCCCLXII.

MODERATION IN THE USE OF EARTHLY THINGS INCULCATED.

1 Cor. vii. 29—31. *This I say, brethren, the time is short : it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

IT is no inconsiderable part of Christian wisdom to distinguish clearly between things lawful, things expedient, and things necessary : since many things must be reduced under one or other of these heads according to the circumstances connected with them. The Apostle is writing upon the subject of marriage ; and gives it as his opinion, that though at all times lawful, and to some persons necessary, it was, at that particular season, inexpedient for those who could conveniently abstain from it ; because the cares necessarily attendant on a married life would increase their difficulties during the present persecuted and afflicted state of the Church. But, while they were all left at liberty respecting the line of conduct they would pursue in relation to this, he solemnly warns them, that the same abstraction from worldly cares, and indifference to worldly pleasure, were necessary for all who would approve themselves to God. As his words equally concern the Church of God in all ages, it will be proper to consider,

I. The direction given us with respect to the things of time and sense—

It is but too obvious that men's regards to this world are, for the most part, inordinate and excessive—

[If all do not set their hearts upon the same object, there is something which every unconverted man regards with an idolatrous attachment. Has he some prospect of attaining it? his mind goes forth to it in warm and eager desire. Is there reason to apprehend a disappointment respecting it? he is kept in anxious suspense, as though all his happiness were bound up in it. Is he brought to the possession of it? he congratulates himself as having reached the summit of his wishes, and thinks he can never lend himself too much to the enjoyment of his newly acquired comforts. Is he by any means bereaved of his beloved idol? what vexation of mind, and what dissatisfaction with the dispensations of Providence does he feel! He is so entirely swallowed up in sorrow for his loss, as to be insensible of all his remaining blessings. Of course, men will differ widely as to the particular gratification which they affect: some find their delight centered in their wife or children; others in their wealth and honour; others in their ease and pleasure; and others again in some indulgences, which habit has rendered essential to their happiness: but the same love of carnal things, however diversified as to its objects, pervades mankind of all ages and of all descriptions.]

But we should maintain an equableness of mind under all circumstances, however pleasing or afflictive—

[We are not required to exercise a stoical apathy under the various events of life; we may rejoice or weep, according as the occurrences of the day are suited to excite the affection of joy or sorrow. But “our moderation should be known unto all men;” nor should any thing of a temporal nature so occupy our minds, as to make us forget that we have concerns of infinitely greater importance. Have we “formed a connexion” that promises us the highest bliss? we should so enjoy the creature as to be ready to surrender it up again to God, whensoever he may be pleased to call for it. Are we “weeping” for the loss of a dear relative, or on account of any other calamity? we should not so give way to sorrow as to forget that we have God for our friend, and heaven for our inheritance. Has any thing of a very “joyous” nature befallen us? we should still remember, how unsatisfying it is in its nature, how contracted in its use, how precarious in its continuance, and how short in its duration; and we should regulate our joy by such considerations as these. Have we been blessed with such success, that we are enabled to “purchase” great possessions? we should be watchful over our spirits, that we do not say, like the fool in the Gospel, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry^a.”

^a Luke xii. 18, 19.

And while we "use" our good things with thankfulness to the Donor, we should be careful never to "abuse" them to the purposes of pride, intemperance, and carnal ease.]

This direction derives great force and importance from,

II. The reason with which it is enforced—

Every thing here below is transient and of short duration—

["Time is short:" if our days be extended to seventy or eighty years, the whole period of our existence will appear but, as it were, "a span long," when we come to the close of it: or, if we compare it with eternity, it is no more than the twinkling of an eye. Moreover, while our lives, like a sail that is in the act of being furled, are every moment contracting, every thing around us also is drawing to a close^b. As actors on the stage perform the part assigned them, and each succeeding scene brings their fictitious joys or sorrows to a speedy termination, so we make our appearance on the stage of life; and, having sustained the character allotted us by the Disposer of all events, we soon bid adieu to all these transient scenes, and enter on a state of everlasting bliss or woe^c. Or as men please themselves with some empty show, that passes in procession before their eyes, but it is scarcely come fully into view before it begins to recede, and in a little time totally disappears; so we scarcely behold the glare and glitter of this vain world, before the enchanting prospect vanishes, and the phantom passes onward, to astonish and delude succeeding generations.]

Can there be any stronger argument for sitting loose to the things of time and sense?—

[Were either our joys or our sorrows permanent, there would be some reason for having our minds deeply affected with them: but when we know that a few months or years must put an end to every present sensation, does it become us to be much elated with what is pleasing, or much depressed with what is painful? Should not the infinitely greater importance of eternal things so engross our minds, as to render every temporal concern comparatively trivial? Should not the prospect of appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ cause us to estimate our happiness by a far different standard, and to consider ourselves in a blessed or miserable state, not so much by what we enjoy or suffer in this present world, as by our

^b Συνεσταλμένος translatione e Velis sumpta—Beza.

^c Σχῆμα is thought by some to convey this idea: others think it refers rather to a passing spectacle.

preparation to give up our account to God, and our hope of an approving sentence from the Judge of quick and dead? Let then the transitoriness of earthly things moderate our affection to them, that whether we attain and enjoy them, or lose and want them, we may still have God as our abiding and all-sufficient portion.]

ADDRESS—

1. The young and inexperienced—

[You are ready to imagine that some change in your circumstances, to which you look forward, or perhaps which you rather wish for than expect, would make your cup to overflow with joy, and perfectly satisfy your most enlarged desires. But be assured that, if you could at this moment possess all that your heart can wish, you would be quickly constrained to confirm the testimony of Solomon, that it is “all vanity and vexation of spirit.” Happy would it be for you if you could be prevailed upon to purchase your experience at the expense of others; and not, like those who have gone before you, grasp at a shadow till you lose the substance. Ask those who are old and grey-headed, whether they have not found the world to be “a vain show, wherein men disquiet themselves in vain^d.” And ask the godly in particular, whether they who fear God have not a truer enjoyment even of this present world, than the votaries of gain or pleasure^e.” Or rather we would say, attend to God’s expostulation, and obey his voice; “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness^f.”]

2. Those who have grown old in the service of the world—

[Lamentable it is, that the very persons who have found the insufficiency of the world to make them happy, are still as regardless of the eternal world, as those who are just entering on the delusive path. If age or experience have blunted the edge of their feelings with respect to present things, they are as insensible as ever either of pain or pleasure from spiritual concerns: nor are they at all more stimulated to improve the time that remains to them, than if their eternal interests were of no value. Yea; age has often no other effect than to confirm the errors, and rivet the prejudices, of their former years. Inquire, brethren, whether you have profited by your experience; and whether you be now “setting your affections on

^d Ps. xxxvii. 6.

^e 1 Tim. vi. 17. Matt. v. 5.

^f Isai. lv. 2.

things above, and not upon things below^g?" You have hitherto regarded the blessed Saviour, and your own immortal soul, as though you regarded them not; and suffered your whole heart to be occupied about the world. Now reverse your conduct, and all will yet be well: let the greatest concerns of time and sense make but a light impression on your minds; and let an interest in Christ, and the salvation of your soul, be regarded henceforth as *the one thing needful*. "Be no longer fools, but wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil^h:" and while the fashion of this world is passing away, endeavour to secure an "incorruptible inheritance in heaven."]

^g Col. iii. 2.

^h Eph. v. 15, 16.

MDCCCCLXIII.

AGAINST CAREFULNESS.

1 Cor. vii. 32. *I would have you without carefulness.*

THERE were, as might be expected, subjects of great difficulty and delicacy submitted, from time to time, to the Apostle Paul, for his decision. In matters of expediency was he consulted, no less than of duty. Of that nature was the question which was proposed to him from Corinth, on the subject of marriage. Of the lawfulness of that holy ordinance there could be no doubt, since it was instituted by God himself, even in the time of man's innocency in Paradise. But of the expediency of embarking in the engagements of matrimony, under the circumstances of the Church in that day of trial and persecution, reasonable doubts might well be entertained. His opinion upon it therefore was asked; and he gave his judgment with all the tenderness that the occasion required. "In that season of distress^a," he thought that persons of either sex would do well to keep themselves unmarried; since they would be more at liberty to act, or suffer, for the Lord, than if they were involved in the cares and duties of a family. And as to the general question, whilst he left all to judge and act for themselves, he thought that, where no very urgent reason existed for engaging in the matrimonial contract, it would be

^a ver. 26.

found more easy to serve the Lord fully in a single state, than in a state which must necessarily be attended with some “distracted” and embarrassment.

Upon this particular question I have no design to enter. But the basis upon which the Apostle framed his decision, is alike applicable to all cases, and in all ages: “I would have you without carefulness.” Dismissing, therefore, from our minds the subject proposed to him, and which, in fact, must depend altogether upon the personal feelings and peculiar circumstances of every distinct individual, I will proceed to shew you,

I. The evil and danger of “carefulness”—

Every kind of care is not evil; but only that care which is attended with anxiety. And this is evil,

1. As distracting our mind—

[It is surprising how even a small matter, upon which we set our hearts, will incapacitate us for attending to our spiritual concerns. Some object to be attained, or some trial to be avoided, or some difficulty to be overcome, though in itself of very trifling moment, will so dwell upon the mind as to indispose us for reading the word of God; and will even so disturb our repose by night, as to unfit us for any mental exertion — — — The injury which this must do to the soul is obvious — — —]

2. As impeding our progress—

[The eastern dress is calculated to impede the movements of him that wears it: and hence Elijah girded up his robes, when he ran before Ahab^b. To this the Apostle refers, when he speaks of “our laying aside every weight, and the sin that more easily besets us^c.” Any care operates in this way, as a weight upon the feet, and an obstacle to our progress, even in temporal duties, and much more in those which are of a spiritual nature. Our blessed Lord illustrates this by another image, taken from agriculture; and tells us, that “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the good seed that has been sown within us, and prevent it from growing up to perfection^d” — — —]

3. As tending to turn us from the path of strict integrity—

^b 1 Kings xviii. 46.

^c Heb. xii. 1.

^d Matt. xiii. 22.

[Whatever engages the affections strongly, will warp the judgment, and produce a strong bias upon the mind. Duties, which would interfere with the prosecution of our object, will be neglected; and measures, which may facilitate the attainment of it, will be adopted, without any scrupulous attention to their exact legality. Truth, honour, probity, will be sacrificed, rather than the favourite object be lost. And what need I say more, to mark the evil and danger of inordinate desire? To whatever it have respect, it is a root and source of evil, which, if not corrected, will destroy the soul^e.]

You will then, of course, desire to be informed,

II. How we may most effectually divest ourselves of it—

Much might be spoken upon this subject: but two hints only shall suffice:

1. Get a deep sense of the obligations which God has laid on *us*—

[See what your God has already given you in the blessings of creation — — — in the care of his providence — — — and, above all, in the wonders of redemption — — — What can you wish for more? Should not a reflection on these things fill you with unutterable joy? What can any thing else be in comparison of these stupendous mercies? Verily, whatever it be that is the object of your desire, it can be no more than the dust upon the balance, when weighed against the inconceivable blessings already conferred upon you — — —]

2. Get a lively sense of the obligations which he has laid upon *himself* also respecting us—

[He has bound himself to us by covenant and by oath, that “we shall want no manner of thing that is good.” If only we “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, every earthly blessing shall be added unto us.” We have only to “make our requests known to him, and all that we want shall be done unto us^f.” We have no more real occasion for carefulness than the birds of the air^g, or than the child in the mother’s arms. The clouds, the rock, the very ravens, should supply our wants, and for forty years together, rather than we should be destitute of any thing that is good. Only call to mind how the Almighty God cares for you, and you will feel no difficulty in casting your care on him^h — — —]

APPLICATION—

^e 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

^g Matt. vi. 25—34.

^f Phil. iv. 6.

^h 1 Pet. v. 7.

[Dear brethren, I would have you all like Mary; who, when her sister "Martha was careful and cumbered about many things, was intent only on the one thing needful." In relation to the concerns of eternity, be as careful as ye will. In reference to these things, the Apostle approves of, and applauds, our careⁱ — — — And, if only in this matter ye will be "as wise as the children of this world," ye shall never fail of obtaining all that your souls can desire — — —]

ⁱ He uses *the same word in reference to both*, and no less than five times: ver. 32—34.

MDCCCCLXIV.

PROPER ACCOMPANIMENTS OF KNOWLEDGE.

1 Cor. viii. 2. *If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*

OF all the apostolic churches, not one abounded with such various and enormous evils as that of Corinth. To bring the people to a better mind was the continual labour of the Apostle; and a difficult task he found it: for, whilst some denied his authority, others justified the very evils which he endeavoured to correct. Hence, on different subjects, an appeal was made to him, that he might state his sentiments upon them fully, and lay down rules for their future conduct.

The eating of meats offered to idols was a ground of much contention among them. They all, to a certain degree, were agreed on this, that "an idol was nothing in the world;" and that the circumstance of meat having been offered to an idol could not defile the meat itself, or render it unfit for food. But there were some who thought, that by eating such meat they should, in some respect, be partakers in the idolatry of those who had offered it to their idols. Those who saw their liberty in relation to this matter felt proud of their superior discernment; and, for the purpose of displaying their superiority to such antiquated prejudices, would actually go into the very temples of the idols, and eat with the idolaters

themselves. This, as might be well expected, gave great offence to their weaker brethren, and proved a stumbling-block to many; who were induced, by this example, to pursue the same line of conduct, whilst yet they doubted the lawfulness of it in the sight of God; and thus were led to the commission of damning sin by the unhallowed boldness of their own brethren^a. The Apostle marked the precise line of distinction which ought to be observed in this matter. The eating of meat offered to idols was allowable; since neither the act, nor an abstinence from it, would make them either better or worse in the sight of God. But the eating of it in an idol's temple was decidedly wrong; since it did, in fact, both sanction idolatry, and involve them in a participation of it^b. But the eating of it *at all, in the presence of one who doubted the lawfulness of it*, was wrong; because it put a stumbling-block in the way of a weak brother, and tempted him to violate the dictates of his less-enlightened conscience. The Apostle acknowledges that the general sentiment respecting the vanity of idols was right; but still declares, that if any person thought his knowledge so decisive that it needed not to be under the regulation and controul of love, it was a clear proof that, "as yet, he knew nothing as he ought to know."

Now, though this subject is not of any great interest to Christians in general, I conceive it to be of very great importance to Churches, where there is any considerable profession of religion; and especially to Churches wherein there are, as at Corinth, a number of persons who need to have the lines of demarcation drawn between Christian liberty and Christian duty.

I will proceed, then, to set before you,

I. The defects usually attendant on knowledge—

We must not take the Apostle's words in too strict a sense, as though a person must be unconscious of any proficiency in knowledge: it is not possible for

^a ver. 7—11.

^b 1 Cor. x. 18—22.

one who has studied a subject thoroughly to imagine himself as ignorant of it as he was before he turned his attention to it, or as another person who has never spent one hour in the contemplation of it. It is not possible for a philosopher to suppose himself on a level with a peasant in point of intellectual attainment. The very idea is altogether repugnant to reason and common sense: and, therefore, we must be careful not to put on the Apostle's words a construction which would involve such an absurdity as that.

But knowledge, through the corruption of our fallen nature, is attended with many and great defects. It is but too frequently accompanied with, yea, and too often generates in its possessors,

1. Conceit—

[To speak of knowledge *generally*, would draw us too far from our subject. It is of knowledge as connected with religion that we are called to treat: and perhaps it is in that precise view that its attendant evils are most fully seen. For it is not attained by great labour, like other knowledge. There is a key to that, which is not to be found in relation to any other branch of knowledge whatever; a key which will open a way to all its richest stores, and without which its stores are inaccessible to mortal man: and that key is a broken and contrite spirit. Now, as this key may be in the possession of a poor unlettered man, whilst a man of learning and research has not found it, the poor man may have his mind enriched with stores to which his more learned neighbour is an utter stranger: and therefore it must not be thought strange, if, in an uncultivated mind, it should generate somewhat of conceit. The possessor of that key has a consciousness that "God has revealed to him, a babe, what he has hid from the wise and prudent;" and therefore feels himself, *in that respect*, superior to his less-enlightened, though more learned, neighbour: and if he be somewhat elated with a superiority which nothing else could give him, we may lament it, but we cannot altogether wonder at it. But this conceit is frequently carried beyond the objects of *mere* spiritual discernment, and leads persons to think that they have a like superiority in reference to all things connected with religion: and here they greatly err; for the things which come within the sphere of spiritual discernment are few; such as, the depth of our fall, the necessity of a Saviour, the beauty of holiness, and our entire dependence on the influences of the Holy Spirit for the production of every good work within us: but the things connected with these are infinite; and, for

a just view of them, we must be indebted to much deep learning and critical research. And it is an evil, a very great evil, when religious people, because their eyes have been opened, and they can say, "Whereas I was blind, I now see," imagine that they can see what is really beyond the sphere of their observation.]

2. Dogmatism—

[Wherever there is conceit, there will be a proportionate degree of readiness to dictate to others. Men, conceiving themselves to be right, will of course conclude all others to be wrong; and will lay down the law with as much confidence as if they were infallible. Persons of every different communion will do this: the Papist and the Protestant, the Churchman and Dissenter, the various classes of Dissenters, all are alike assured that they themselves are right, and that all who differ from them are wrong. Nor is it only in the forms of Church government that they will express this confidence, but also in relation to the doctrines of our holy religion; every one being ready to make articles of faith for his neighbours, as well as for himself, and to exclude from the pale of his Church all who cannot pronounce his Shibboleth. In truth, this has been the source of almost all the divisions that are to be found in the Church of God. It is this species of dictation which has driven from the Popish Church millions of holy men: and I am not sure that the Church of England also would not have done better, if she had left on neutral ground all which has no direct bearing on the spiritual welfare of her communicants. The Apostle complains of those at Corinth who insisted on points, which, if complied with, rendered men no better, or, if neglected, rendered them no worse. And had his spirit been more generally prevalent amongst every denomination of Christians, there would have been more real unity amongst them than all the acts of uniformity in the world, and all the rules of every distinct body, ever did, or could, produce.]

3. Contemptuousness—

[This is nearly allied with the former. The next step to the believing that others are blind in comparison of ourselves, is, to despise them for their want of just discernment. Hence religious professors often speak of those who maintain different sentiments from themselves, as ignorant and carnal. With what contempt will a Calvinist regard an Arminian brother, as having no insight into Divine truth; whilst an Arminian will ascribe to his Calvinistic brother every sentiment that is degrading to God, or discouraging to man. Those of their own party are wise: but all others are "fools and blind." How much of this leaven was there in the Corinthian Church! and

how much is there of it in the present day! How many are “fond of vain jangling, desiring to be teachers, though they understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm,” but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmises, and perverse disputings^c! Whereas the one rule of conduct to a Christian should be this: “We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves^d.” In truth, I scarcely know whether ignorance itself be not preferable to knowledge so absurd: for ignorance is destructive to ourselves only; whereas a contemptuous spirit of dictation is injurious to the whole Church. But this I know, at all events, that “if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself^e,” and that true wisdom is, to “esteem others better and wiser than ourselves^f.”]

But let me turn from this painful subject, to mark,

II. The qualities with which our knowledge should be imbued—

Knowledge is doubtless a most signal blessing, if it be accompanied with those dispositions which will turn it to good account. It should in every instance be blended,

1. With humility—

[The effect of knowledge should always be, to shew us how little we know. In every science under heaven we can advance but a little way: after a few steps, we are wholly out of our depth. And, if this be the case with respect to sciences which admit of demonstration, how much more must it be so in reference to religion, where we know nothing but by revelation! Look at the philosophers of Greece and Rome, and see how little they knew, either of God or man. The most unlearned person who has been instructed in the knowledge of the Gospel has juster views of God, and of man, than all the wise men of antiquity put together. Yet what does the most exalted Christian know, either of the one or the other? Of God we have no *positive* knowledge at all: our knowledge of him is altogether *negative*. We know that He is not a material being; and therefore we call him a Spirit: but we know no more what a Spirit is, than we did the hour that we were born. We assign to him certain perfections: but what those perfections are in themselves, or how they are exercised, we know scarcely any thing: we only know that he is *not* weak,

^c 1 Tim. i. 6, 7. and vi. 4.

^e Gal. vi. 3.

^d Rom. xv. 1.

^f Phil. ii. 3.

not unwise, *not* unjust, *not* unmerciful, and so on: but, if we should attempt to declare what he *is*, we should only “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” Of man, too, how little is known! Self-knowledge is exceeding rare: and the person in whom it exists in the highest degree will be the most ready to acknowledge the truth of that observation, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: *who can know it?*” In a word, “If any man would be truly wise, he must become a fool, that he may be wise ^g.”]

2. Diffidence—

[Where such a multitude of opinions prevail on all subjects, who is he that shall claim an exemption from error? Who will venture to say, ‘All others are wrong, and I am right?’ Doubtless there are some truths of which, *in a general view*, we may be confident; because they are revealed so plainly in the word of God, that they cannot be misapprehended; and because we have the witness of them in our own souls. But when we come to enter into *particulars*, we soon find ourselves involved in difficulties that are insurmountable, if not in absolute contradictions. Let us try this in reference to any point whatever; and we shall have evidence enough of our ignorance, even in the things that we are best acquainted with: nay, we shall find, on many occasions, reason to alter our opinions, and, on fuller information, to adopt those which we had before rejected. We should be careful, therefore, so to embrace sentiments, as to hold ourselves still open to conviction; and so to maintain opinions, as to admit that others may be possessed of truth as well as we.]

3. Consideration—

[There may be much knowledge, where there is but little wisdom. Knowledge may be superficial and crude; though, I confess, in that state it scarcely deserves the name of knowledge. It ought to be matured by a large and comprehensive view of things, under all the variety of circumstances in which they can occur: for, without such an attention to circumstances our very knowledge may be foolishness, and our light no better than darkness. We know that we are to observe every ordinance that God has enjoined: but if the calls of mercy be heard, they must supersede even the plainest ordinance that is of a ritual nature. In the chapter before us, as in the Epistle to the Romans also^h, the want of consideration was that which was particularly blamed in those who ate the meat which had been offered to idols. Had they done it in secret, there had been no harm: but, when they did it in the presence of a weak brother, they shewed a grievous want of consideration, to

^g 1 Cor. iii. 18.

^h Rom. xiv.

discern the expediency or in expediency of their conduct. It is right to declare the Gospel without fear: but it is not right to “cast pearls before swine.” In every thing, therefore, of a practical nature, we should so attend to every minute circumstance of time and place, as to keep clear of offence to any, and to “prevent our good from being evil spoken ofⁱ.”]

4. Love—

[Without this, all knowledge is vain. Of what value was the knowledge of those Corinthians, who would display it at the expense of the souls of their own brethren, whom they led into sin! Many who preach the Gospel are particularly faulty in this respect. They mind only what they are able to declare, without ever considering what their hearers are able to receive. A man, coming into a sick chamber, would not at once cast a flood of light upon the eyes of the patient, when he was scarcely able to endure the glimmering of a taper: love would keep him from so injurious an act: and the same heavenly principle should operate universally in the exercise of our knowledge: we should put a veil over our faces, if men be unable to behold the splendour of our communications; or, in other words, we should give “milk to babes, and strong meat to those only who are capable of digesting it.” In reference to the point before us, St. Paul shews us the proper office of love in these things: “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend^k.”]

In order to a due IMPROVEMENT of this subject, let us cultivate,

1. Docility of mind—

[In this especially are we to resemble little children^l. Divine truth is manifestly beyond our comprehension; and we must receive it simply on the authority of God. It is in this way that we attain even human knowledge. What does a child know of grammar? but, from acquiescing in the instructions given him, he comes to find that all those things which once appeared to him so dark and unintelligible have a real foundation in language itself, and that we could not communicate ideas upon any abstract subject without them. Much more, therefore, must Divine knowledge be so received. We do not comprehend any thing fully at the first: but from receiving implicitly God's declarations, respecting our fall in Adam, our recovery by Christ, and all the other wonders of redeeming love, we shall at last attain an internal evidence that things both *are* so, and *must be* so. The proper frame of

ⁱ Rom. xiv. 16.

^k ver. 13.

^l Matt. xviii. 3.

mind for all of us is, that of the Centurion and his friends: "Now we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God^m." If we come to God "poor and hungry, we shall be filled with good things: but if we come rich and full, we shall surely be sent empty awayⁿ." "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him."]

2. Moderation of sentiment—

[We must guard against running to extremes; or so embracing any subject, as to be unwilling to weigh what is to be said against it. I do not mean by this, that we should run into scepticism, or involve ourselves in controversy; but that we should so hold our own sentiments, as to conceive that others who differ from us may have a measure of truth on their side as well as we. We should doubtless form our own opinions on all things that come fairly before us: but we should concede the same liberty to others; and be as willing that others should walk according to the dictates of their consciences, as we of ours. Had this disposition reigned in the apostolic Churches, how happily might those of different sentiments have lived together! But "the weak would judge the strong; and the strong would despise the weak^o." Had each made due allowance for the other, God had been honoured, and peace preserved.]

3. Tenderness of deportment—

[Lovely is that rule which the Apostle has laid down, in his Epistle to the Romans; "Him that is weak in the faith, receive you; but not to doubtful disputations^p." How happy would it be, if this rule were more generally observed! But the evil is, that almost every one is ready to insist on his own peculiarities, and to make them a ground of controversy and division. Surely it were far better to live under the influence of love; and to leave matters of minor consideration to the judgment of every individual. Doubtless, about things of primary and vital importance, we must both maintain our own opinions, and inculcate them on others, with a holy zeal; according as it is written, "Ye should contend earnestly for the faith that was once delivered to the saints^q." But even in this we should be careful always to "speak the truth in love;" and be studious only to "win the souls" of men, and not to proselyte them to a party. We may "have all the knowledge of men or angels; but it will profit us nothing if it be not under the influence of love^r." "Knowledge may puff us up; but it is charity alone that edifieth^s."]

^m Acts x. 33. ⁿ Luke i. 53. ^o Rom. xiv. 2, 3.

^p Rom. xiv. 1. ^q Jude, ver. 3. ^r 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2 ^s ver. 1.

MDCCCCLXV.

PREACHING THE GOSPEL.

1 Cor. ix. 16. *Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!*

RESPECTING men's call to the ministerial office, it would be difficult to speak with any degree of certainty. That of the Apostles was clear and unquestionable: that of individuals, amongst ourselves, must be judged of by many circumstances, known only to the persons themselves, and but indistinctly known even to them. But the obligation to discharge the office with fidelity, when once it has been undertaken, is as manifest in relation to us, as it was in reference to St. Paul himself: a dispensation having been committed to us, we may every one of us say, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel!"

In discoursing on these words, I will endeavour to explain,

I. The office of ministers—

This, in one word, is to "preach the Gospel." And here let us distinctly mark,

1. What is meant by the Gospel—

[The Gospel imports glad tidings; and it is particularly to be understood of the glad tidings which are brought to men respecting a salvation provided for them, a salvation through the blood and righteousness of our incarnate God. Such a salvation has been effected for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, who expiated our guilt upon the cross——— and now lives in heaven to complete the work which he began on earth——— and offers salvation to all who will believe in him——— This is the Gospel: nor does any thing but this deserve the name———]

2. The duty of ministers in relation to it—

[They must preach it, as God's heralds and ambassadors: they must preach it *fully*, in all its parts; *freely*, without any mixture of self-righteous conceits; and *constantly*, making it the one subject of all their ministrations. If they preach the law, it must be in order to prepare men for the reception of the Gospel. If they preach obedience, as doubtless they must, is must be as flowing from the united influence of faith and

love. They must speak to men nearly in the same strain as they would if they had received a commission to preach to those who are already suffering the penalty due to their sins. They should not flatter men with any conceits about their own goodness, or the ability which they possess to deliver themselves; but should offer them mercy through the atonement made for them upon the cross, and call them to accept it as the free gift of God for Christ's sake — — —]

Supposing us to have undertaken this office, let us notice,

II. The indispensable necessity of discharging it with fidelity—

“ Woe is unto us if we preach not this Gospel” faithfully. For if, from any consideration whatever, we forbear to do so, what account shall we give,

1. To God, who has committed this office to us ?

[If we have neglected it, through the fear of man, or the love of this present evil world, or through mere indolence, what shall we say, when summoned to give an account of our stewardship? Should we have loved any thing in comparison of Him? or feared any besides Him? or counted any thing too much to do for Him? How vain will all our excuses appear in that day!]

2. To the souls whom, by our unfaithfulness, we have betrayed ?

[Men may now say to us, “ Prophecy unto us smooth things; prophecy deceits;” and they may be pleased with our compliance. But when they meet us in judgment, how bitter will be their reproaches, and how loud their complaints against us! — — — The very persons whose favour we courted when on earth, will be among the first to cry out for vengeance on our souls.]

3. To the Saviour, whose dying love we should have made known ?

[What shall we say, when the Saviour shall remind us of all that he has done for the salvation of *our* souls? Is it *thus* that we should have requited *him*? Did he come from heaven for *us*, and die upon the cross for *us*, and confer on *us* the honour of being his ambassadors to a ruined world; and have we felt no more regard for *him*, and *his* interests in the world? How shall we call on the rocks and mountains to cover us from his merited indignation!]

4. To ourselves, who have trifled thus with our own salvation ?

[*Now* any foolish excuse will satisfy us: but how will our conduct appear in that day? Methinks our self-reproach will be the bitterest ingredient in that cup of bitterness which we shall have to drink for ever.]

But let us not close the subject without reflecting on what is evidently IMPLIED in it—

1. The woe which awaits those who *embrace* not the Gospel—

[If we are bound to preach it, no doubt you also are bound to receive it with all humility of mind, and with the gratitude which such tidings call for at your hands. You must not think that you have discharged your duty, when you have merely heard the word: you must receive it as the word of God to your souls: you must embrace it, as suited to your necessities, and sufficient for your wants. You must contemplate it, and rely upon it, and glory in it, and get your souls poured, as it were, into the very mould of the Gospel; that so it may have its perfect work upon you. This you must do: and if you do it not, it will prove to you, “not a savour of life unto life, but a savour of death” to your heavier condemnation. Remember, then, your own responsibility: and, whilst you pray for your minister, that he may be found faithful, be exceeding urgent with God in prayer, that the word ye hear may take effect, and prove the power of God to the salvation of your souls.]

2. The blessedness of those who discharge their ministry aright—

[They may meet with much opposition from an ungodly world: but they are truly happy, in the hope that “they shall both save themselves and those who hear them.” Sweet is the thought which a faithful minister has in looking forward to the time of meeting his people at the judgment-seat of Christ. The sight of many whom he shall then have to present to God as his spiritual children, saying, “Here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me;” and the prospect, that, to all eternity, he shall have them as “his joy and crown of rejoicing” before his God; say, is not *this* delightful? Will not *this* be a rich reward for all his labours, and for all that he had suffered in the discharge of his high office? Yes, verily, if he had died a thousand deaths for them, this would be an abundant recompence: and this blessedness assuredly awaits the laborious minister, the faithful servant of his God^a.]

^a If this were the subject of an *Ordination or Visitation Sermon*, here, of course, would be the place for encouraging ministers to labour diligently in their high and holy calling.

MDCCCCLXVI.

THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

1 Cor. ix. 19—23. *Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews ; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law ; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak : I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.*

IT is a favourite sentiment with some, that the epistles of St. Paul, having been written to particular Churches and on particular occasions, are of little importance to us at this day. And, of all the epistles, this before us is most open to that objection, as having been, more than any other, written for the correction of some existing abuses, and in answer to some specific questions. But God, by whom the Apostle was inspired, knew that, whether the same specific points should again arise or not, the general principles by which they were to be determined would be of use to the Church in all ages : and accordingly we find, that the views and sentiments which were elicited from the Apostle on these occasions give us a deeper insight into the Christian character than we could otherwise have obtained. We are here instructed not merely by general and abstract principles, but by a practical application of those principles to circumstances fitted for the illustration of them. And we cannot but account it a great blessing to the Church, that the enemies of the Gospel were permitted so to assault the character of the Apostle, as to extort from him a vindication of it, and thereby to obtain for the Church in all ages a complete exposition of practical Christianity.

The words before us open with extraordinary precision *the nature and extent of Christian liberty* : for the fuller explanation of which we shall distinctly mark,

I. Its proper boundaries—

Liberty cannot exist without restrictions; for, if unlimited, it would degenerate into licentiousness. Besides, if every man were at liberty to act agreeably to his own corrupt wishes without any controul, the weaker would be a prey to their more powerful neighbours, and would be the constant victims of tyranny and oppression. St. Paul, though at liberty to vary his conduct according to circumstances, was still under a law by which his liberty was restricted: “he was not without law to God, but under the law to Christ.” Christian liberty is a right to do or forbear any thing,

1. Which is not evil in itself—

[What is evil in itself can be warranted by no circumstances under heaven: “We must not do evil that good may come,” even though the good which we promise ourselves be ever so great. We must not do it *for the gratification of others*. If our dearest friends and relatives endeavour to persuade us, we must be alike deaf to their menaces or entreaties. We must “not love father or mother more than Christ;” yea, we must even “hate them in comparison of Christ;” that is, we must, when their will comes in competition with that of Christ, act as if we hated them, giving no more heed to them than we would to an avowed enemy. The plain answer to be given to all who would wish us to act contrary to any command of God, is this; “Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.”

Neither must we do evil *for our own advantage*. If an act be sinful, we must, like the Hebrew Youths, refuse to do it, even though we saw the fiery furnace, already burning with seven-fold intenseness, ready to destroy us. So likewise, if a duty be clear, we must not be deterred from the performance of it, even though we knew that the consequence of our perseverance must be an immediate incarceration in the den of lions: like Daniel, we must prefer the maintenance of a good conscience to the preservation of courtly favour, and the avoidance of a cruel death^a. In all such circumstances we must embrace the proffered alternative, and surrender up our lives rather than violate a command of God.]

2. Which is not evil in its consequences—

[An act perfectly innocent in itself may, by the circumstances in which we are placed, become no longer innocent.

^a Dan. vi. 10.

If, for instance, the eating of meat offered to an idol be likely to prove a temptation or a stumbling-block to a weak brother, we are then no longer at liberty to eat it, notwithstanding in itself it is a matter of perfect indifference. We are bound to have respect to his weakness, and to abstain from a thing which may become an occasion of sin to him: and, if we do not abstain from it, "we sin against him," and "we sin against Christ^b."

So likewise, if a thing would be injurious to ourselves, we must not do it, even though others might be at liberty to do it. Suppose, for instance, we know from experience, that splendid equipage or apparel administers to, and calls forth into exercise, the pride and vanity of our hearts; or that a luxurious table is apt to lead us to intemperance; or that some particular amusement operates as an incitement to covetousness, or a provocative to wrath; we should deny ourselves in those particulars, and not seek an indulgence that we have reason to fear will become an occasion of sin. The express command of God in all such cases is, "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil it in the lusts thereof^c."

Thus under a variety of circumstances is our liberty abridged, even in things that are, under other circumstances, indifferent: for though *all* things may be lawful, they may not be expedient; and we must not so "be brought under the power of *any*," as not to be able to forego them, if the welfare either of ourselves or others demands the sacrifice^d.]

Such, we apprehend, are the limits beyond which Christian liberty has no existence. But within these limits there is abundant scope for,

II. Its legitimate operations—

In all that we do, we should keep in view the best interests of mankind—

[Whatever Paul did, or whatever he forebore, his one object was to promote the salvation of his fellow-men. This he tells us six times in the short space of four verses: and in another place he tells us, that he had the same object in view in all that he suffered: "We endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory^e." Such must be our object also in all that we do. We must not be seeking merely to please men; for "if we please men, we cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ:" in as far as we seek to "please them, it must be solely for their good to edification^f." To remove their prejudices, to conciliate

^b 1 Cor. viii. 8—12.

^c Rom. xiii. 14.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 12.

^e 2 Tim. ii. 10.

^f Rom. xv. 2.

their regards, to “choose out acceptable words,” to accommodate ourselves to their apprehensions, are all legitimate methods of gaining a more easy access to their minds, in order that we may ultimately “win their souls:” and, as we administer milk or meat to persons according to their capacity to profit by it, with a view to the sustenance of their bodies, so we may do for the benefit of their souls: and, if only we keep this end in view, we shall in all that we do “be approved and accepted both of God and man^g.”]

For this end our liberty may be used without reserve—

[It is delightful to see how free and unembarrassed the Apostle was in all his intercourse with mankind, and how studiously he adapted himself to all their varied prejudices or necessities. Was he with a Jew;—he submitted freely to the yoke which Moses had imposed, though he well knew that the Gospel had freed him from it. On the other hand, was he with Gentiles who had never been subjected to the law of Moses;—he readily conformed himself to their habits. If he was with one that was weak in faith, he cheerfully bore with all his weaknesses and infirmities, and acted, as he would have done, if his own mind had been under the influence of the same doubts and fears as agitated the mind of his weaker brother. In a word, “he became all things to all men.”

Now this is the very course which we should pursue: we should seek the welfare of our brethren precisely as he did, namely, in a way of *self-denying restraint*, and in a way of *con-descending compliance*.

We should seek it in a way of self-denying restraint. Not again to recur to the mention of eating meats offered to idols, which “the Apostle would not do as long as the world should stand, if it should make his brother to offend^h,” we may see in the chapter before us how determinately he refused to accept the support to which both by the laws of God and man he was justly entitledⁱ. Such concessions are most lovely; and would be productive of incalculable good in the Church of God. In a family, for instance, the governing part of it is not willing that all which an inferior member of it may think conducive to his benefit shall be allowed to him: it would become the inferior to evince a self-denying spirit, and cheerfully to concede a part of his privileges, that he may not irritate and embitter the minds of his superiors. It may be asked, perhaps, “What, am I to sacrifice any thing which I think profitable to my soul?” I answer, Yes: and God would repay you for so doing, provided you did it purely from a tender

^g Rom. xiv. 18.

^h 1 Cor. viii. 13.

ⁱ ver. 12, 15.

concern for the welfare of your superior: the very self-denial, which such an act would call forth, would itself be a more substantial benefit to the soul, than all the gratification which would have followed from self-indulgence: and St. Paul himself has set us an example of this conduct: "I," says he, "please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved^k."

We should further seek it in a way of condescending compliance. Paul, in order to meet the prejudices of the Jews, and to gain the easier access to their minds, circumcised Timothy: and with the same view he submitted to the tedious rites and ceremonies which attended the performance of the Nazarite's vow^l. And if we were more willing to meet the wishes of those who are prejudiced against the truth, we might greatly allay their hostility, and often win their souls. There is in many young Christians an unreasonable stiffness in relation to matters of pure indifference; and they will often plead conscience for their non-compliance, when it proceeds solely from a want of compassion for the ignorance of others, and of due concern for their souls. They will please themselves, however much their enemies be offended, when by kindness and condescension they might have operated a favourable change upon their minds.

Well do we know, that these principles may be easily perverted; and that it will often be extremely difficult to know how far, and in what manner, they are to be called forth into action. Nevertheless, the principles themselves are good, and indispensably necessary to be embraced and cultivated by all who would adorn the Gospel of Christ: and, if only we look well to the motive by which we are actuated, we shall not be likely to err very materially in the application of them. The main point to guard against is, the doing any thing which is in itself sinful, or any thing, the lawfulness of which we ourselves doubt: for we ought certainly to be fully persuaded in our minds, that the restraint which we impose on ourselves, or the concession which we make, be not contrary to any express command of God. Where the concession which others require at our hands is forbidden of God, there the rule must be observed; "We must obey God rather than man."

From the whole view of this subject, we cannot but

REMARK,

1. Of what infinite importance is the salvation of the soul!

[Whence was it that the Apostle laboured so indefatigably

^k 1 Cor. x. 33.

^l Acts xxi. 26.

in every possible way to save the souls of men? Whence was it that he even “wished himself accursed from Christ, or after the example of Christ, for his brethren’s sake?” Did it not proceed from a conviction, that the souls of men were of infinite value, and that, if he could but “by any means save some,” he would be richly repaid? But think of all that Christ did and suffered — — — and then say, whether your souls are not of more value than ten thousand worlds; and whether any labour, any self-denial, any sacrifice can be too great for the advancement of their eternal welfare? — — —]

2. How exalted is the morality which we are called to practise, if ever we would attain salvation!

[Doubtless it is through Christ alone, even through his blood and righteousness, that we must find acceptance with God: but we must serve Christ as well as believe in him. He has indeed fulfilled the law for us; but he has not therefore dispensed with its requirements: on the contrary, “we are under the law to Christ;” and are to fulfil his will precisely as the Apostle Paul did; having our hearts filled with zeal for his glory, and with love to the souls of men. We quite mistake, if we imagine, that Christian morality consists in a mere abstinence from outward sins, or a compliance with outward observances: the heart must be given up to God, and the whole soul be engaged in seeking his glory. It is well known, that by nature we are altogether selfish, and desirous that every thing should bend to our will, and every person should consult it: but grace teaches us to have our own will mortified and subdued; and “to live no longer to ourselves, but altogether to our God.” O brethren, aim at *this*: be satisfied with nothing short of *this*: and be aspiring after this blessed attainment daily, and with your whole hearts: for it is in this way only that you can “be partakers of the Gospel,” and of the inheritance of the saints in light^m. It is by this that you will approve yourselves “followers of Paul, as he was of Christ.”]

3. How greatly do we need to be guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit!

[Who is sufficient for these things? These attainments are high and difficult; and the very way to them is dark and slippery. It is easy to think ourselves upright in our intentions, when we are in reality actuated by a desire of man’s applause, or a fear of his displeasure. It is easy also to fancy that we are sacrificing our own wishes for the good of others, when we are only gratifying our own earthly and carnal

^m ver. 23.

desires. In these things none but God can keep us from error; none but God can "perfect that which concerneth us." Pray then, that the Holy Spirit may guide you into all truth. Pray, that He, who upheld the Saviour in all his arduous work, may "form in you the mind that was in Christ Jesus." Thus you may hope to be preserved blameless amidst all the difficulties with which you are encompassed, and to win by your conversation many, who would never have been won by the word alone.]

MDCCCCLXVII.

DIRECTIONS FOR RUNNING OUR RACE.

1 Cor. ix. 24. *So run, that ye may obtain.*

THERE is not any thing around us from which we may not draw some hints for our spiritual instruction. The habits and customs of the world, if duly improved, will afford us many valuable lessons. A reference to these is peculiarly useful when we wish to convey instruction to others; because it strikes the imagination more forcibly, and carries stronger conviction to the judgment. St. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, availed himself of the Isthmian games which were celebrated there, to illustrate their duty with respect to their souls. Amongst other sports, that of the foot-race was held in high estimation; and great preparations were made by those who engaged in them, in order to qualify them for their extraordinary exertions. In reference to these the Apostle speaks of himself as running in this race; and proposes himself to the Corinthians as a pattern for their imitation, if they were desirous to win the prize.

We shall consider,

I. The direction here given—

The words of the text are not a mere exhortation to run our race, but a special direction respecting *the manner in which we are to run it*^a. We should be, like the Apostle,

^a οὕτω refers to *the manner* in which the Apostle ran; and ἵνα to *the end* for which such exertion was necessary. To enter into the full

1. Disentangled from worldly cares—

[St. Paul, as he tells us in the foregoing context, had equal liberty with others to marry, and to take a wife with him in his journies. But he knew that such a step would involve him in many cares, and impede his exertions in the cause of Christ. He therefore lived in celibacy himself, and recommended it to others, both men and women, especially during those seasons of persecution, when they were liable every day and hour to be called to lay down their lives for the Gospel's sake^b. Now, though there is not any necessity for us to imitate him in this individual act, yet *we must admit the principle in its fullest extent, and live under its influence continually*. We must study to be "without carefulness^c." We must endeavour to "serve the Lord as much as possible without distraction^d." We must "not entangle ourselves more than is necessary with the affairs of this life^e," or multiply our cares in such a way as to rob our souls of the attention due to them. To do this would be as absurd as to "load our feet with thick clay^f," when we were about to run a race. On the contrary, we should endeavour to "lay aside every weight^g," conscious that cares of every kind impede our progress in the divine life, and, if suffered to increase, will endanger our ultimate success^h.]

2. Divested of selfish principles—

[Never was a selfish spirit more subdued and mortified, than in the Apostle Paul. Instead of claiming from the Corinthian Church that support, which God himself had assigned to every minister of the Gospel, he endured numberless wants and hardships, in order to set an example of disinterestedness to othersⁱ. And, when he himself was perfectly acquainted with the extent of Christian liberty, he "made himself the servant of all," becoming all things to all men, that by all means he might save some^k. Thus did he forego what he might have justly claimed, and consent, as it were, to pay, what none had any right to demand: he willingly sacrificed both his pecuniary rights, yea, and his Christian liberty too (as far as conscientiously he could) for the benefit of immortal souls.

meaning of the text, the whole chapter should be borne in mind: and in that view it will unfold to us a subject of no ordinary importance. *This should be distinctly marked in all the passages that are referred to in this chapter.*

^b ver. 5. with 1 Cor. vii. 1, 7, 8, 26, 27.

^c 1 Cor. vii. 32.

^d 1 Cor. vii. 35.

^e 2 Tim. ii. 4.

^f Hab. ii. 6.

^g Heb. xii. 1.

^h Matt. xiii. 22.

ⁱ ver. 12—15.

^k ver. 19—22.

Such is the way in which we are to run. But O, how many professors of religion have been retarded (yea, and have cast stumbling-blocks also in the way of others) by a rigorous exaction of their dues, or by an unwillingness to sacrifice their worldly interests! How many also have been kept from making a progress themselves, and from helping forward their fellow-sinners, by an unyielding zeal for Christian liberty on the one hand, or a bigoted attachment to human forms on the other! Happy would it be for every individual in the Church of Christ, if a desire of advancement in the Divine life disposed them to “look, not on their own things only, but also on the things of others¹,” and “to seek the welfare of others not only in conjunction with, but (to a certain degree) in preference to, their own^m.”]

3. Determined, if possible, to win the prize—

[They who proposed to contend in the race, maintained, for a long time before, the strictest temperanceⁿ, and habituated themselves to the most laborious exertions. In reference to them, St. Paul tells us how careful he was to keep under his body, and to bring it into subjection, in order that he might be the fitter to run the Christian race^o. *Thus must we be trained* both in body and mind, in order that we may run well and “endure unto the end.” We must accustom ourselves to labour and self-denial, mortifying every corrupt affection, and “giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure^p” — — —]

Let us next turn our attention to,

II. The argument with which it is enforced—

The Apostle's expression is concise: but there is much IMPLIED in it:

1. We cannot win the race without running *in this manner*—

[However persons strove for the mastery in the games, they were not crowned, unless they strove according to the laws prescribed them^q. Thus, however earnest we may be in running for heaven, we never can gain the prize, unless we conform to the rules that have been laid down. This is the course that we are to run over. It abounds indeed with rough places, and steep ascents: but we must not deviate from it. We may easily find a smoother path; but we must run in that which is marked out for us, and abide in it to the end — — —]

¹ Phil. ii. 4.

^m 1 Cor. x. 24.

ⁿ ver. 25.

^o ver. 27.

^p 2 Pet. i. 10.

^q 2 Tim. ii. 5.

Let us then inquire, whether we be treading in the Apostle's steps — — — And let the fear of coming short at last, stimulate us to unremitting exertions^r — — —]

2. If we run in this manner, we are sure of winning the race—

[Of those who contended in the race, one only could win the prize^s: but it is not so in the race that we run: every one that enters the lists, and exerts himself according to the directions given him, must succeed. None have any reason to despond on account of their own weakness; on the contrary, those who are the weakest in their own apprehension, are most certain of success — — — Only let us not be satisfied with “running well for a season;” but let us “hold on our way,” till we reach the goal^t. Then we need not fear but that we shall “finish our course with joy, and obtain a crown of righteousness, from the hands of our righteous Judge^u” — — —]

3. The prize, when obtained, will amply compensate for all our labour—

[Poor and worthless as the prize was to him that won the race, the hope of obtaining it stimulated many to contend for it. How much more then should the prize held forth to us, together with the certainty of obtaining it, call forth our exertions! Compare our prize with theirs in respect of *honour*, *value* and *duration*; how infinitely superior is it in every view! Theirs was but the breath of man's applause; ours is honour coming from God himself. Theirs was a green chaplet, that withered in an hour; ours is an incorruptible, undefiled, and never-fading inheritance in heaven^x — — —]

Let every one that is engaged in the race, survey the prize. Let him at the same time contemplate the consequence of coming short, (not a transient disappointment, or loss of some desirable object, but everlasting misery in hell,) and the labour necessary to attain it will appear as nothing. None that have succeeded, *now* regret the pains they took to accomplish that great object: though thousands that have refused to run, now curse their folly with fruitless remorse — — — Let not any then relax their speed: but all attend to the directions given; and “so run, that they may obtain the prize.”]

^r ver. 27.

^s ver. 24.

^t Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^u Col. iii. 23, 24. and 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

^x ver. 25.

MDCCCCLXVIII.

THE MANNER IN WHICH ST. PAUL SOUGHT FOR HEAVEN.

1 Cor. ix. 26, 27. *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.*

THE Scripture teaches us no less by examples than by precepts. Doubtless the great exemplar, which all are to follow, is the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom there was no sin at all. But, next to him, the Apostles deserve our regard. St. Paul frequently exhorts us to be imitators of him: but he always limits that counsel by the superior regard which we owe to Christ; and bids us to follow him, so far only as he followed Christ. In this view he introduces the passage which we have just read. He has been recommending to the Corinthians a holy self-denying conduct. To enforce his exhortation, he states to them how he acted under a variety of difficult circumstances: and lastly, in reference to the Isthmian Games which were celebrated in that city, he gives them, in the words before us, a very animated view of his own experience, which he proposes to them for their imitation.

We may notice in these words,

I. The manner in which the Apostle exerted himself—

It is scarcely necessary to say, that heaven was the prize for which he contended. For this he laboured,

1. With careful attention^a—

[As the course was precisely marked out for those who ran in the race, so there were certain rules prescribed in every one of the games; in allusion to which St. Paul elsewhere says,

^a The precise sense of the text cannot easily be determined. Ὡς οὐκ ἀδηλως may mean, "Not without distinguishing himself;" and ὥς οὐκ αἶρα ἐέρων may mean, "Not as one that misses his blow." The Author has given what he apprehends to be a just sense, without taking upon him to determine between the opinions of contending commentators. See Doddridge (on the place), who throws a beautiful light on the last clause of the text.

“If a man strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully^b.” Now in running the Christian race, there are rules indispensably necessary to be observed, if we would have the prize adjudged to us. One rule in particular we mention, because it is expressly specified by the Apostle, and because it virtually includes all others: it is, that we must “look unto Jesus,” as the pattern for our imitation, as the source of our strength, as the medium of our acceptance, “as the Author and the Finisher of our faith^c.” Now the Apostle did not run as a person regardless of the rules, but as one who was determined in all things to observe them.

For want of this care, many who appear desirous of getting to heaven, fall short of it at last: they are not sufficiently instructed, especially in relation to the rule that has been specified: they are apt to satisfy themselves with rules of their own devising; and on this account they are found at last to have “spent their strength for nought.”]

2. With ardent zeal—

[A person who should be brandishing, as it were, his arms, and should “beat the air” in a way of sportive exercise, would be very unlike to one who was engaged in actual combat. Such a difference exists between those who merely profess to engage with their spiritual enemies, and those who are really “warring a good warfare:” nor is this difference less visible in the Christian world, than it would have been on the stage where such spectacles were exhibited. Now the Apostle was not a mere pretender to religion: he saw too much of the importance of eternal things to waste his time in empty professions: he knew that, if he did not vanquish his enemies, his enemies would destroy him; and therefore he strove to “fight a good fight,” and to “quit himself like a man,” who would rather die than yield.]

3. With absolute self-denial—

[Those who intended to engage in the different games, used much self-denial in the whole of their diet and mode of living, in order that they might be the better able to endure the fatigues and hardships which they must inevitably experience in the contest: and, when they came to the trial, they put forth all their strength, that they might gain the victory. The enemies with which the Apostle contended, were numerous and mighty. Those which he particularly refers to in the text, were, his own indwelling corruptions. He found that, in common with all others, he had “lusts warring in his members,” yea, “warring against his soul.” To subdue these,

^b 2 Tim. ii. 5.

^c Heb. xii. 1, 2.

it was necessary that he should put forth all his strength. He had already gained a great advantage over them, as a man who had got his antagonist's head under his arm, and was beating him in the face with all his might^d. He would not give them any liberty to regain their former ascendancy, but was determined to subdue them utterly.]

We shall easily account for these exertions, when we call to mind,

II. The considerations by which he was actuated—

It is painful to see how persons, who are enslaved by human systems, will wrest the Scriptures, to make them coincide with their own views. Did the Apostle mean to say, that he exerted himself thus, merely lest he should by any means be betrayed into some fault, which should cause him to be disapproved of *men*? Had he not respect to God also, and to his eternal state? No man living, whose judgment was not warped by a predilection for a system of his own, could doubt one moment but that the Apostle was actuated by two considerations;

1. A hope of gaining the prize—

[This is manifestly implied in his words: and such a hope is the main spring of activity to every Christian that is under heaven. The Apostle well knew, how infinitely an unfading crown of glory surpasses the perishable chaplets that were awarded to the victors in the different games. He could not endure the idea, that others should take so much pains to obtain a corruptible crown, which yet only *one* would win; and that he himself should be remiss in seeking an incorruptible crown, which *all* who contended earnestly for it must obtain. The securing of this he felt to be *the one thing needful*; and therefore he determined to make it the one object of his ambition.]

2. A fear of losing it—

[The person who executed the office of herald in the different games, introduced others, and encouraged them to the contest, but did not contend himself. But the Christian herald, who stirs up and encourages others to engage in the race or combat, must himself both run and fight: and, if he do not engage with his whole heart, however he may have animated others, he himself will not be deemed worthy of the

^d This seems to be implied in ὑπωπιάζω μου τὸ σῶμα.

prize. Now the Apostle felt that the same exertions were necessary for him as for all others; and that peculiar guilt and shame would attach to him, if he, after having preached successfully to others, should at last fail of success himself. On this account therefore he laboured to "destroy the whole body of sin." He was conscious that the smallest advantage gained by his bodily appetites might be attended with the most fatal consequences; and therefore he strove to "mortify his earthly members," and to "crucify his flesh with its affections and lusts."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are satisfied with the name and profession of Christianity—

[Were such a life as yours sufficient to obtain the prize, there were no propriety in such figures as the Apostle has used in the text. Be assured, that, if St. Paul found such exertions necessary for himself, they are no less so for you: and, that if he could not get to heaven without them, much less can you.]

2. Those who have relaxed their exertions—

[It is not the beginning well, but the enduring to the end, that will avail to the saving of the soul. Some indeed will say, "Once a child of God, and always so:" but God warns you, that if any man turn back, his soul shall have no pleasure in him. It is only by a patient continuance in well-doing that you can obtain the glory and honour and immortality which you profess to seek for. The labour that has been bestowed upon you is all in vain, if you do not maintain your steadfastness even to the end. "Be not weary therefore in well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not."]

3. Those who are discouraged through apprehensions of failure—

[Well might all be discouraged, if success depended on our own strength. But "God has laid help upon One that is mighty;" and it is our privilege to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." However weak therefore you yourselves are, and however powerful your enemies, you have no reason to despond, since, "through the strength of Christ you can do all things."]

4. Those who are "contending earnestly for the faith" and practice of the Gospel—

[You know not indeed the precise measure of your course: but it is pleasing to reflect, that it may very soon be

terminated, and that the prize shall be adjudged, not to the one who surpasses all others, but to all who "run their race with patience." Methinks, the Saviour, the Judge of all, is holding forth the prize to you; and the whole host of heaven are witnesses of your exertions. Consider the countless multitudes that are already crowned, and that have bid an everlasting adieu to all the dangers of warfare, and the fatigues of running. Soon your hour also shall arrive: only, whenever it may arrive, let it find you exerting yourselves with all your might; that you may be able to say with your dying breath, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me; and not unto me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."]

MDCCCCLXIX.

THE MANNA AND ROCK TYPES OF CHRIST.

1 Cor. x. 3, 4. *They did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that rock was Christ.*

THOUGH it is certain that the covenant of grace is ordered in all things and sure, and that God will fulfil his promises to all who believe, yet there is no man so absolutely assured of his own interest in the Divine favour, as that he can with safety cast off all watchfulness and circumspection. The Corinthians, by going to the utmost verge of their Christian liberty in eating things offered to idols, were in danger of being drawn back into actual idolatry. The Apostle recommends to them therefore to exercise self-denial, as well for their own sake, that they might not be ensnared, as for the sake of others, whose weak consciences might be wounded. He tells them that he himself felt the necessity of mortifying all his appetites, and that he was obliged to "keep his body under, and to bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away." He then proceeds to remind them of the Israelites, who, notwithstanding the numberless privileges that they enjoyed, as God's

peculiar people, perished in the wilderness for their manifold provocations. Among the privileges which he specifies, we shall fix our attention upon that referred to in the text; and shall take occasion from it to inquire,

I. What was that spiritual food which the Israelites partook of in the wilderness?

God, having brought his people into the wilderness, sustained them there with miraculous supplies of bread and water—

[About six weeks after their departure out of Egypt^a, their provisions were spent, and they began to be in want of bread. God therefore promised them a constant supply from day to day: forbidding them to reserve any for the morrow, except on the day preceding the sabbath, when they were to gather sufficient for two days' consumption. This food (which for want of any more appropriate name they called manna, i. e. a portion) descended from the clouds every night; and, when the dew that covered it was exhaled by the sun, it appeared on the face of the ground: it was a very small white thing like coriander seed, which they ground in their mills, and baked; and, in taste, it was like wafers made of fresh oil and honey^b. Of this there was a constant and regular supply for forty years; nor did it ever fail, till their want of it was superseded by the corn, of which they got possession in the land of Canaan. In like manner, water was given them out of a rock in Horeb, by a stroke of that rod, with which Moses had divided the Red Sea^c: and it was made to follow them in all their encampments for about thirty-eight years; when, for their further trial, the stream was dried up, and a similar miracle was wrought for them again in Kadesh-barnea^d.]

This food, though carnal in its nature and use, was truly “spiritual;” inasmuch as it was,

1. A typical representation of Christ—

[Our Lord himself copiously declares this with respect to the manna: He draws a parallel between the bread which Moses gave to the Israelites, and himself as the true bread that was given them from heaven; and shews that, as the manna supported the natural life of that nation for a time, so he would give spiritual and eternal life to the whole believing world^e.

^a Exod. xvi. 1.

^b Exod. xvi. 13—31. with Numb. xi. 8.

^c Exod. xvii. 5, 6.

^d Numb. xx. 8—11.

^e John vi. 48—58.

The same truth he also establishes, in reference to the water that proceeded from the rock. He told the Samaritan woman, that if she would have asked of him he would have given her living water^f. And on another occasion he stood in the place of public concourse, and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink^g;" thereby declaring himself to be the only "well of salvation," the only rock from whence the living water could proceed. Indeed, the Apostle, in the very words of the text, puts this matter beyond a doubt; "they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them;" and "*that Rock was Christ.*"

2. A sacramental pledge of his blessings—

[Under the Gospel dispensation there are two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper: and these are not only "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace," but they are also "means whereby we receive that grace, and a pledge to assure us thereof." Thus when the Israelites were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea," they were consecrated unto God; and they received, as it were, an earnest from him, that all the blessings of his covenant should in due time be imparted to them, unless they, by their violation of the covenant, should provoke him to withhold them. In the same manner the bread and water miraculously given and continued to them, were a pledge, that they should one day "eat of the hidden manna," and "drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand for evermore," provided they continued steadfast in the covenant, and walked worthy of their heavenly calling. Thus while their daily food typically represented, and, to those who partook of it in faith, really conveyed, spiritual blessings, it was "an earnest to them of that Spirit," whom the water typified, and "an earnest of that inheritance," which Christ should purchase for them by his obedience unto death^h.]

And that this food was not peculiar to them may be shewn by considering,

II. In what respects it was the same with that which we now partake of—

When the Apostle says, that they all eat *the same* spiritual meat, he does not mean that all the Israelites subsisted on the same food (for that was obvious enough, and was of no consequence to his subject) but that their spiritual food, represented by the manna

^f John iv. 10—14.

^g John vii. 37, 38.

^h 2 Cor. i. 22. Eph. i. 14.

and the water, was the same that still nourishes the Church of God. To elucidate this we may observe, it was the same,

1. In its nature and substance—

[As their bodies could not have maintained their vigour without the daily use of bread and water, so neither could their souls flourish, unless they daily fed upon Christ, the living bread, and received from him renewed communications of his Spirit. And are there any other means of subsistence for our souls? Has not our Lord expressly told us, that “except we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we have no life in us?” Has not St. Paul also assured us, that none can belong to Christ unless they be partakers of his Spirit? We are as destitute of strength in ourselves as the Israelites were; and need the same direction, support, and succour. If any man could be sufficient of himself, surely the great Apostle of the Gentiles was: but he corrects himself instantly when he appeared to have suggested an idea that was capable of that interpretation; “I live,” says he, “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me^k.” This is precisely what the believers in the wilderness did, when they subsisted on their spiritual food; and it is what every believer must do as long as the world shall stand.]

2. In its use and tendency—

[The daily supply of manna, and of the water from the rock, continually reminded them of their dependence upon God, and encouraged them to serve him with a willing mind. But the conveyance of spiritual blessings to them under these symbols would go further still, and actually produce the dispositions, which the outward blessings could only tacitly recommend. And what are the dispositions which the eating of the bread of life, and the drinking of the living water uniformly create? Do they not lead us to a dependence on God’s care, and a devotedness to his service? The very end for which our Saviour died, was, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them: no doubt therefore his love, when shed abroad in the heart, will incline us to do this^l; and his grace communicated to the soul, will enable us to do it.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. In what spirit we should attend the ordinances of the Gospel—

ⁱ Rom. viii. 9.

^k Gal. ii. 20.

^l 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

[The Israelites were left to feel their need of food before the miraculous supplies were given them: and with what avidity would they gather up the new created bread! with what insatiable appetite would they bow down to drink of the flowing stream! Such is the spirit with which we should approach the ordinances of our God. In them the manna is rained round about our tents: in them the rock is struck, and the waters of salvation flow around us: and if we come hungering and thirsting, we shall never be sent empty away. Let none then consider the ordinances as mere occasions for gratifying their curiosity, but as the place where spiritual food is set before them for the support and comfort of their souls. The Israelites would ask but one question; Is this provision suited to my necessities? So neither should we concern ourselves much about the *manner* in which the ordinances are dispensed, but rather go, that we may receive Christ in them, and have more abundant communications of his Spirit imparted to us.]

2. What should be the habit of our minds when we have partaken of spiritual blessings—

[The particular object of the Apostle in the text is, to inculcate the necessity of fear and caution: and the argument he uses is well calculated to effect his purpose. Two millions of Israelites came out of Egypt: they were brought in safety through the Red Sea, and supported by this miraculous food: yet, of all who had attained the age of twenty, two only were suffered to enter into the promised land. All the rest perished in the wilderness: and the very profession which they made, and the privileges which they enjoyed, served but to enhance, in most instances, it is to be feared, their eternal condemnation. Moreover they were intended by God himself as examples to us^m; that we, admonished by their fate, might suppress all irregular desires, and walk more worthy of our high calling. Well therefore does the Apostle add, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." We never are so much in danger as when we think ourselves most secure. Let us then "not be high-minded, but fear:" whatever mercies we have experienced, and whatever enjoyment of *spiritual* blessings may have been vouchsafed to us, let us remember, that we are not beyond the reach of temptation: we may "have escaped for a while the pollutions of the world, and yet be again entangled therein and overcomeⁿ:" it is not sufficient for us to have "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come:" we may still "fall away, and return to a state from whence we shall never be renewed to repentance^o."

^m Τυποί, ver. 6, 11.

ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^o Heb. vi. 5, 6.

“ Let all then take heed, lest, a promise being left them of entering into God’s rest, they should by any means come short of it^p.”]

p Heb. iv. 1.

1 CORINTHIANS, X. 3, 4.

See Sermon on 1 Tim. i. 11. where it forms the THIRD Sermon of a series.

MDCCCCLXX.

THE JUDGMENTS ON THE ISRAELITES TYPICAL.

1 Cor. x. 11. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

THE Holy Scriptures were not given to the world, to amuse us with an account of past occurrences, but to instruct us in the way to eternal life. Nor are the historical parts less conducive to this end, than the preceptive ; since they shew us, in a striking view, the characters of them that are saved, and of them that perish. The history of the Israelites would be entertaining as a romance ; but, as an exemplification of God’s dealings with his Church, it is inestimable. Hence the Apostle expresses great concern that the Corinthian Church should be acquainted with the things that had happened to the Jewish nation ; in order that they themselves might be on their guard, lest, resembling the Jews in their conduct, they should also resemble them in their fate.

Let us consider,

I. The typical events here specified—

The Jews, notwithstanding the mercies vouchsafed to them, perished in the wilderness for their iniquities—

[Great, exceeding great, were the favours conferred upon them: they were brought, under the immediate direction of God, through the Red Sea, and were baptized thereby into the covenant which God made with them by Moses. They

were also sustained by food miraculously afforded them, food, not carnal only, but "spiritual," if spiritually improved^a.

But, instead of following the Lord fully, "they forgot God their Saviour," and addicted themselves to idolatry, to fornication, to distrust and murmuring^b.

For these, and other impieties, the heavy wrath of God came upon them; and two only, of all the adults who had come out of Egypt, were suffered to enter into the promised land.]

In this view they were intended as types and examples^c to us—

[St. Peter mentions the judgments inflicted on fallen angels, the antediluvian world, and the cities of the plain, as exemplifying those which should come upon all, who at any period, should live and die in an ungodly state^d. St. Jude, in addition to those instances, mentions also the Israelites, who perished in the wilderness^e. The former might properly represent the people, who are wholly ignorant of God; the latter may more particularly characterize those who profess religion: and the disappointment which they experienced in consequence of their sins, was typical of that, which all must experience, who profess to have been called with a holy calling, and yet walk unworthy of their profession. In them we see that the greater our privileges, the heavier, if we abuse them, will be our condemnation.]

Being so deeply interested in the events recorded concerning them, we should consider attentively,

II. The admonitions they give us—

The Jewish dispensation closed, and the Christian dispensation commenced, in the apostolic age: and, this being the last that ever shall be given to the world, we who live under it may be said to live in the concluding period of the world.

Now the foregoing events admonish us,

1. Not to rest in a mere profession of religion—

[It was to no purpose that the Israelites called themselves the people of God, while they were unmindful of the obligations which such a profession entailed upon them. While they called God and Abraham their father, they were, like their descendants also, children of the wicked one^f. Thus it will be in vain for us to call ourselves Christians, if we have not the

^a ver. 1—4.

^b ver. 7—10.

^c ὅμοιοι.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 4—6.

^e Jude, ver. 5.

^f John viii. 39, 41, 44.

power as well as the form of godliness^g. On the contrary, as God disowned the people before referred to, so, however confident our claims to his favour may be, will He disown us in the day of judgment^h. Let us seek then to be Christians, “not in word, and in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” Let us not only unite ourselves to the church of God, but also devote ourselves to God in body, soul, and spirit.]

2. Not to indulge any evil desires—

[This is particularly specified by the Apostle as a principal end for which these events were recordedⁱ. Had the Israelites watched against the first risings of sensuality and lewdness, they had not fallen into those numerous sins which brought upon them God’s heavy displeasure. And, if we would be preserved from spiritual idolatry, or even from the grossest acts of uncleanness, we must avoid all needless connexion with an idolatrous world, and labour to suppress the first motions of sin which work in our members. “God requires truth in our inward parts;” nor shall any but the pure in heart ever behold his face in peace^k. An “hypocrite in heart only treasures up wrath against the day of wrath.”]

3. Not so to presume on any past mercies, as to forget that we have need of continual watchfulness and circumspection—

[The Israelites thought, that, after so many signal manifestations of God’s favour towards them, they could never be cast off. But, like Lot’s wife, they stand as a pillar of salt to us^l. Let not us then forget, that we may have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, and yet be entangled again with it and overcome^m,” and that “we may have been enlightened by the word of God, and have tasted of the powers of the world to come, and yet so apostatize, as never to be renewed unto repentanceⁿ.” The Apostle himself felt the necessity of “keeping his body under, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a cast-away^o,” much more therefore should we, however confident we may be of our own steadfastness, “take heed lest we fall^p.” Let us then not be satisfied with having come out of Egypt, or having put ourselves under the Divine guidance, or having lived hitherto on Christ, the living bread and living water: but let us go on in dependence on his grace, and in obedience to his will. Let us combine a consciousness of our proneness to fall, with an

^g Jer. vii. 4.

^h Compare Deut. ix. 12. with Matt. vii. 21—23.

ⁱ ver. 6.

^k Matt. v. 8.

^l Luke xvii. 32.

^m 2 Pet. ii. 20.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 4—6.

^o 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^p ver. 12.

humble affiance in him, "who alone is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^q."]

BE ADMONISHED then, every one of you, my beloved brethren—

1. Ye who are resting in outward forms—

[See how earnest the Apostle Paul was in impressing these facts on the minds of his Corinthian converts: "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of these things^r." So say I to you: "I would not have you ignorant of them." Indeed, indeed, they are too little considered. If you had asked all the six hundred thousand men after they had passed the Red Sea, and beheld all their enemies dead upon the sea-shore, Whither are you going? They would all have confidently replied, "We are going to Canaan, and doubt not but that we shall in due time possess it." And this is what all say respecting heaven. But of *them* only two ever arrived in safety at that good land. And I tremble to think how many of *you* will in all probability fall short of the promised rest in heaven. You are all Christians *in name*: but are you all such in truth? Would to God ye were! Would to God that ye were all living by faith on the Lord Jesus, and altogether devoted to his service! — — — But I must tell you, that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force:" for neither can a race be won, nor a battle gained, without very different exertions from what we behold in the Christian world at large.]

2. Ye who make a profession of vital godliness—

[This was the state of the Corinthian Church, on whose minds St. Paul laboured so earnestly to impress these known and acknowledged facts. Think not then, my brethren, that it is superfluous for me to inculcate the consideration of them upon you, and such an improvement of them as your state demands. Think not that ye have attained such stability as to render these admonitions unnecessary: but know, that the more you possess of holy fear, the more certain will you be of God's effectual aid. It is only when you are weak in yourselves, that you are really strong; and, when in a simple dependence upon God you are "following the Lord fully," then only can you hope, with Caleb and Joshua, to possess that good land that floweth with milk and honey.]

^q Jude, ver. 24.

^r ver. 1.

MDCCCCLXXI.

AGAINST SELF-CONFIDENCE.

1 Cor. x. 12. *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

THE things which are recorded in the Holy Scriptures are written, not for the entertainment, but for the real improvement, of our minds. Doubtless, as gratifying our curiosity, there is no book under heaven so interesting as the Bible: but as exhibiting what must be realized in our own experience, as shewing us our duties and our difficulties, our helps and our remedies, our punishments and our rewards, it claims, infinitely beyond all other books, our unremitting attention. In this view the Apostle, having mentioned the misconduct of the Israelites in the wilderness, and the destruction which they brought upon themselves by means of it, founds upon their history this solemn admonition; “*therefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*”

From these words we may learn,

I. That all, even the most eminent, are liable to fall—

[The most distinguished characters of antiquity have fallen^a — — — They have betrayed their weakness in those very points, wherein their eminence chiefly consisted^b — — — Who then amongst us will presume to say, “I am in no danger of falling^c?” — — —]

II. That the more self-confident we are, the more likely we are to fall—

^a Noah, Gen. vi. 9. with ix. 21. Lot, 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8. with Gen. xix. 33—36. David, Acts xiii. 22, with 2 Sam. xi. 4, 5, 15. Solomon (who was called Jedediah, the beloved of the Lord, 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25.) 1 Kings xi. 1—9.

^b Abraham, Rom. iv. 20. with Gen. xii. 12, 13. and xx. 2, 11. Job, Jam. v. 11. with Job iii. 3. Moses, Numb. xii. 3. with xx. 10, 11. Jeremiah, Jer. ix. 1. with xx. 8, 9. Paul, Acts xx. 24. with xviii. 9, 10. when he seems to have been struck with a panic.

^c John iv. 14. and 1 Pet. i. 23. shew the proper qualities and tendency of *grace*; but do not at all affect what the Scriptures elsewhere affirm to be the tendency of our inherent *corruption*.

[Self-confidence naturally emboldens us to rush into temptation — — — And necessarily provokes God to leave us to ourselves — — — By means of the former, our occasions of falling are greatly multiplied: by means of the latter, our ability to stand is utterly withdrawn^d — — — God, for his own honour's sake, is concerned to let us fall, in order that we may know and confess, that our sufficiency for any good thing is derived from him alone^e — — —]

III. That, if we would be kept from falling, we must look well to our steps—

[As in a slippery path peculiar caution is required, and an inattention to our steps will probably issue in some painful accident, so more especially is it necessary to use circumspection in the path of duty. Who can tell the snares and temptations that beset us? Who can tell what may be the consequences of any step we take? Who can reflect on all the circumstances that arose from one single glance of David's eye, and not feel himself exposed to continual danger? The most important events of our lives may be traced to some trivial cause, some matter of pure indifference: and events, equally or more important, perhaps no less than the everlasting salvation of our souls, may depend on the very next step we take. Surely then we should in "all things be circumspect^f:" we should "take heed to our ways;" we should walk in an humble dependence on God for direction and support; we should cry to him continually, "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not^g."]]

We shall conclude this subject with a few words of
ADVICE :

1. To those who are offended at the falls of others—

[Many, when they see a professor of religion act amiss, are ready to impute his misconduct to the Gospel itself, as though Christianity were only a cloak for hypocrites. But, considering the temptations that surround us, and the corruptions that are within us, it is rather a wonder that any stand, than that some should fall. We mean not to justify, or to extenuate, the sins of any: but we desire that religion should not be represented as promoting that, which it utterly condemns. Let the blame fall on those who merit it, and not be

^d We have a striking example of this in Peter, who to gratify his curiosity went into the midst of his enemies, and was then left to experience his own weakness. Matt. xxvi. 58, 74.

^e Thus he acted towards the Israelites, Deut. i. 42—44.

^f Exod. xxiii. 13.

^g Ps. xvii. 5.

cast indiscriminately on all who profess godliness. Let Judas be branded as a traitor; but let not the odium of *his* offence attach to all the other Apostles, and to their Divine Master.]

2. To those who are endeavouring to walk uprightly before God—

[It is of considerable use to persons when walking on slippery ground, to have hold of each other, that if one slip, the other may afford him immediate assistance. Many falls and bruises have been escaped by these means. Thus it is of great importance to Christians to walk together in love, each helping to support his neighbour, and receiving help from others in the time of need^h. Let all then watch over one another with a godly jealousy. If one fall, let others endeavour instantly, in meekness, to raise him upⁱ. Above all, let every one know in whom his strength is; and pray continually, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe^k.”

“Now to him who is able to keep us from falling, &c. be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen^l.”]

^h Eccl. iv. 9, 10.

ⁱ Gal. vi. 1.

^k Ps. cxix. 117.

^l Jude, ver. 24, 25.

MDCCCCLXXII.

THE SECURITY OF GOD'S TEMPTED PEOPLE.

1 Cor. x. 13. *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

WE are ever prone to run into the opposite extremes of presumption and despair. To check the former, we should reflect upon the manifestations of God's wrath; and to avoid the latter, we should bear in mind the promises of his mercy. With this view St. Paul sets before the Corinthian Church the judgments that had been executed on the Israelites in the wilderness; but lest they should turn his warnings into an occasion of despondency, he assures them, that God himself had engaged to keep all who diligently sought him, and humbly relied upon him.

His words naturally lead us to point out,

I. The temptations of God's people—

Many, doubtless, are the temptations with which the godly are beset—

[It seems from the preceding context that the word "temptation" is to be understood in its most extended sense, as comprehending every thing which might endanger their steadfastness in the ways of God. The *world* strives to ensnare them both by terrors and allurements — — — The *flesh* strongly inclines them to gratify its appetites — — — and *Satan* labours incessantly to beguile them by his wiles and devices^a — — —]

But the temptations of all are such only as others experience in common with themselves^b—

[All are ready to suppose that there are none tempted like them: but if we knew the experience of others, we should find that, "as face answereth to face in a glass, so does the heart of man to man" — — — All indeed are not tempted exactly in the same manner or the same degree (for there are temptations peculiar to men's age and condition in life) but there are none so singularly tried, but that there are many others in similar circumstances with themselves; and the ascertaining of this point often affords much consolation and encouragement to tempted souls.]

Nor are there any trials so great but that believers may be confident of,

II. Their security in the midst of them—

God himself is interested in their behalf; and they may safely rely on,

1. His power—

["That they may not be tempted above that they are able," he will *proportion their trials to their strength*. Are they at present too weak to endure hardship? He will delay its approach^c: or, if he permit it to come upon them, he will weaken its force^d: and, if they be likely to faint under it, he

^a Satan can easily assume the appearance of "an angel of light:" and he does so especially when he stirs up religious professors to distract the minds of the simple with matters of doubtful disputation, and thus to turn the weak, and the conceited, and the vain, "from the simplicity that is in Christ."

^b Ἀνθρώπινος may signify also *proportionable to human strength*; but the common translation seems perfectly just.

^c Exod. xiii. 17.

^d Ps. lxxvi. 10. and Isai. xxvii. 8.

will shorten its duration^e— — — If he do not see fit in any of these ways to lighten the temptation, he will *proportion their strength to their trials*, so that, if there be not a way to escape, they at least “may be able to bear them.” This he effects sometimes by communicating more abundant grace^f, and sometimes by filling them with the consolations^g of his Spirit, and giving them near prospects of the glory that awaits them^h. Thus will he “keep them *by his power* unto everlasting salvation.”]

2. His faithfulness—

[No man, however eminent, could stand, if left to himself: Satan would sift us as wheat, and scatter us as chaffⁱ; but God has promised that “he will keep the feet of his saints;” that “sin shall not have dominion over them;” that “none shall pluck them out of his hands;” that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.” “Nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail:” “He is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent.” He has exhausted all the powers of language in labouring to persuade us of this truth, that he will never forsake his people^k; and they may safely rest on him “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are conflicting with temptation—

[What a blessed promise is that before us! What can God himself say more for your encouragement? Dry up your tears: know that “as your day is, so shall also your strength be:” “there are more for you than against you:” trust therefore in Him who “knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation,” and “is able both to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^l.” But do not say, “God will keep me, and therefore I will rush into temptation:” such an abuse of his mercy as this would surely bring with it the most tremendous evils. We are to trust God when in trouble; but not to tempt God by exposing ourselves to danger without a cause.]

2. Those who are yielding to temptation—

[The generality complain, “That they cannot resist temptation,” and yet they venture continually into those very

^e Ps. cxxv. 3. and Isai. lvii. 16.

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^g 2 Cor. i. 4, 5.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17. Rom. viii. 18.

ⁱ Luke xxii. 31.

^k Heb. xiii. 5. Here are no less than five negatives in the Greek.

^l 2 Pet. ii. 9. and Jude, ver. 24.

scenes which most endanger their virtue. What hypocrisy is this! If flesh and blood be, as they justly acknowledge, so weak and frail, why do they not flee from *the occasions* of sin? and why do they not cry unto God for help? Let all know that their impotency is no just excuse; that all shall receive succour if they will but seek it; and that "God's strength shall be perfected in their weakness^m." But if we will not repent of our sins and turn unto God, the power and faithfulness of God are engaged against us, and will be glorified in our everlasting destruction.]

^m Heb. ii. 18. and iv. 15, 16.

MDCCCCLXXIII.

APPEAL TO MEN OF WISDOM AND CANDOUR^a.

1 Cor. x. 15. *I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.*

AMONGST the various systems of religion that have been promulgated, there is this remarkable difference; that, whilst those which have been devised by man were founded on the deductions of human reason, that which has been revealed by God is founded solely on his own authority. Every declaration, every precept, every promise, every threatening, is introduced with "Thus saith the Lord." Deliberation and discussion respecting these declarations of God, are altogether superseded: man has no alternative, he must believe and obey whatever his God has spoken.

But though revealed religion is neither founded on human reason, nor makes its appeal to it, yet it is perfectly consistent with reason, and approves itself to the judgment of every one whose mind is enlightened by the Spirit of God, and whose passions are subjugated to the higher powers of the soul.

The appeal which the Apostle makes in our text to the judgment of the Corinthian Church has respect

^a This, and the three following Discourses, 1974, 1975, and 1976, were preached before the University of Cambridge, and the Discourse on Ps. cxix. 128. was delivered afterwards with a view to *complete the series*. It may be referred to in that view.

indeed to only one particular point, the maintaining of communion with heathens in their idolatrous sacrifices and oblations. This, as he observes, was inconsistent with their professed allegiance to Christ, and with all hope of participating the blessings of his salvation: and so unquestionable was this truth, that he did not hesitate to appeal to their judgment respecting it.

We are far from saying that all the truths of Christianity are as level with the capacity of men as that which is the subject of the Apostle's appeal: but still we are persuaded, that there is no part of our religion repugnant to reason, nor any part which enlightened reason must not highly approve.

In confirmation of this sentiment we shall endeavour to shew,

I. That the Gospel approves itself to all who are truly wise.

II. That it is the duty of every man to exercise his judgment in relation to it.

I. That the Gospel approves itself to all who are truly wise—

There is a wisdom to which the Gospel does not approve itself,—I mean “the wisdom of this world,” as it is called, even that which is both the root and offspring of philosophic pride. Between this wisdom and the Gospel there is as inveterate an opposition as between light and darkness; the Gospel is regarded by it as foolishness; and itself is no other than foolishness in the sight of God. The Apostle tells us, that by this wisdom the world neither knew God, nor could possibly find him out; that God hath so formed his Gospel as to “destroy the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nought the understanding of the prudent.” Remarkable is that triumphant language of the Apostle, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”

If it be asked, Why this wisdom is so much at variance with the Gospel? we answer, that men filled

with the conceit of their own sufficiency, and wise in their own eyes, are ready to prescribe to God what he shall speak; receiving only what accords with their own preconceived opinions, and rejecting every thing that is not accommodated to their carnal apprehensions. They do not read the Scriptures to learn of God, but rather to criticise what he has revealed, and to sit in judgment upon all that he has spoken. Is it to be wondered at, that the Gospel, which is full of mysteries, should not approve itself to them? yea, that it should be a stumbling-block and an offence to them? It is so, and it must be so, till they shall see that "God is wiser than man," and that "if any man would be wise, he must become a fool that he may be wise."

But though to such proud and self-sufficient sciolists the Gospel of God is foolishness, yet to the truly wise it is a revelation every way worthy of its great Author.

By the truly wise, we mean those persons who are sensible that they stand in need of reconciliation with their offended God, and that the Gospel is a revelation from God respecting the provision which he has made for our restoration to his favour. These persons, conscious of the insufficiency of human wisdom to find out such a plan for the salvation of mankind, receive with humility what God has revealed; and, the instant they know his mind and will, they receive his testimony with the liveliest gratitude, and make it the one ground of all their hopes. These are truly wise; they presume not to dispute with God about the means he has provided, or the terms he has offered, for their salvation; but they accept thankfully what he has so graciously planned, and so freely offered.

To persons of this description the Gospel does approve itself as the wisdom of God and the power of God. It approves itself both *as a revelation*, and *as a remedy*.—*As a revelation*, it appears to stand on a basis that is immoveable; and the evidence of its divine authority is considered as incomparably stronger

than any that can be adduced for any other record under heaven. *As a remedy*, it appears exactly suited to the necessities of fallen man, providing wisdom for the ignorant, righteousness for the guilty, sanctification for the polluted, and redemption for the bond-slaves of sin and Satan. It is further recommended to their approval by the honour which it brings to all the perfections of the Deity, in that justice is no more set aside than mercy, nor truth is violated any more than holiness; but every perfection of God is harmoniously exercised, and more glorified, than it could have been, if such a salvation had never been devised.

We do not at present enter into the particulars of this Gospel, because that will be the subject of our future discourses: but we would give a general clew whereby to discover the true Gospel from every thing that falsely assumes that name. It will be generally granted, that the Gospel which the Apostle Paul preached, was the true Gospel: and we find, that the foregoing marks were inseparable from his doctrines: his statements were disapproved by those who were carried away, either by "philosophy and vain deceit" on the one hand, or by superstition on the other hand: to the Jews his doctrine was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but to those who were called and taught by divine grace, it was the wisdom of God and the power of God. If therefore the Gospel which we preach be disapproved by the same persons as disapproved of his, we have so far an evidence in its favour; whereas, if our Gospel be approved by those who were averse to his, then it is evident that we do not preach the same Gospel as he did. To unsanctified wisdom, the truth of God ever was, and ever must be, foolishness; but to those who are possessed of true wisdom, it is, and ever will be, a stupendous effort of wisdom and of love for the recovery and salvation of a ruined world.

The intent of our present discourse is to bespeak your candour in reference to those which may follow

it, and to shew that, at least in our own judgment, there is such a reasonableness in all our doctrines as must of necessity commend itself to every candid inquirer. We wish not one sentiment to be embraced, without a firm conviction of its truth: we wish every word we utter to be brought to the test of Scripture and of true wisdom. We would say to every man, "Prove all things, and hold fast that only which is good^b."

To impress on our minds the importance of making for our ourselves a candid inquiry into the Gospel of Christ, we proceed to shew,

II. That it is the duty of every man to exercise his judgment in relation to it—

God himself is pleased on some occasions to make an appeal to us respecting his own dealings with mankind: "Judge, I pray you," says he, "betwixt me and my vineyard:" and again, "Are not my ways equal? are not your ways unequal?" In truth, though he is not to be dealt with by us as if he were bound to "give an account to us of any of his matters," yet he treats us as rational creatures, and expects us to use our reason in relation to our spiritual, as well as our temporal, concerns. He draws us indeed, and expects that we should give ourselves up to the influence of his grace; but "he draws us with the cords of a man," that is, with such influences as are suited to our faculties as rational agents. Still, however, we must remember, that, in forming our judgment of the truths revealed to us, we are not called to determine beforehand what it becomes him to reveal; but only by a diligent attention to his written word to consider what he has revealed: and if at first we find such things as we did not expect, or such things as seem to oppose the sentiments we have imbibed, we must not hastily determine that his word is not true, but must suspect our own competency to judge of it, and must say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."

^b 1 Thess. v. 21.

In executing this important duty we shall do well to observe the following rules ; namely,

To form our judgment with care—

To exercise it with candour—and

To implore of God the enlightening and sanctifying influences of his Spirit, that we may be preserved from error, and be guided into all truth.

We must, in the first place, *form our judgment with care.*—It is no easy matter to search out all the mysteries of our holy religion, and to attain a clear and just knowledge of the inspired volume. There are confessedly many passages which are difficult to be understood, and many passages which appear to have, what may be called, an opposite and contradictory aspect. To explain all these, and to reconcile them with each other, and to gather out of them one entire and consistent plan of salvation, is surely no easy work : it should be undertaken with fear and trembling ; and no pains should be spared to execute it aright. To take one set of texts, and to wrest the opposing texts to a sense which they were never designed to bear, will save us indeed much trouble, and gratify a proud contentious spirit ; but it will never bring us to a just view of the truth as it is in Jesus. The way to solve the difficulties of Scripture, is, to give to every declaration of God its proper force, and then to mark the subserviency of one truth to others which appear opposed to it. A person, who should in an ignorant and superficial manner observe the opposite motions that are found in a great engine, would be ready to suppose that the wheels would obstruct each other : but on a closer inspection he would find, that there is a subserviency of one part to another, and that all the motions, however opposite in appearance, tend in reality to one common end. Thus it is in the Scriptures of truth ; there is no real opposition between one part and another ; but every truth has its proper place in the system, and its proper use : if one encourages, another humbles : if one inspires confidence, another stimulates to activity : and true wisdom will lead us to assign to every

truth that place and that measure of importance which seem to be given to it in the sacred volume. Were this mode of investigating the Holy Scriptures more generally adopted, there would be an end of almost all the controversies which agitate and distract the Christian world. The very disposition of mind which would be exercised in such endeavours, would go far to rectify our judgment, and would divest error of more than half its evils.

If it be said, that all have not leisure or ability for such examination of the Holy Scriptures, we answer, That, whether we have more or less of leisure and ability, this should be our mode of proceeding : and those especially, who are to teach others, should be careful to form their judgment in this way. The Scriptures should be studied diligently throughout ; the design of the inspired writers should be especially attended to ; the scope of every distinct passage should be ascertained by a strict examination of the context ; and the general analogy of faith must be borne in mind, in order to regulate us in our interpretation of passages that are of more doubtful signification. In a word, we should without prejudice or partiality attend to every part of the sacred records, and then judge, as before God, respecting the genuine import of the whole. Whatever sentiment is brought before us as of heavenly origin and of divine authority, we must bring it to the law and to the testimony, and give it only such weight in our minds as shall appear to be justified by the general tenour of the inspired volume. It was by such care that the Beræans attained the knowledge of salvation ; and by similar care we may confidently hope to be guided gradually into all truth.

Having thus formed our judgment, we must, in the next place, *exercise it with candour*.—There will to the last, whatever means be used for the regulating of our judgment, be some points whereon there will be a difference of opinion. The minds of men are differently constructed ; and there are no two men in the universe who on all points think alike. It

must be expected therefore, that some diversity of sentiment will remain in reference to religion, as well as on every other subject under heaven. Aware of this, we should form our judgment with diffidence, especially on those points where men of piety have differed from each other. We should consider ourselves as liable to err, no less than others. To imagine that we are in possession of all truth, and to take for granted that all who differ from us must of necessity be wrong, is not consistent with Christian modesty. Of course, if we embrace an opinion, we must of necessity do it, under the idea that the sentiment is just ; but, knowing how weak and fallible we are, we should think it possible that those who differ from us may be right ; or, at all events, that the truth may be partly on their side as well as on ours. But even where we feel greater confidence as to the rectitude of our judgment, we should feel no hostility to those who differ from us ; they have the same right to exercise their judgment as we ; and we should no more be offended with them for not viewing things in the same light as we, than for their not resembling us in the stature of their body or the features of their countenance. By this observation we do not mean to express an approbation of indifference respecting religious sentiments ; for there are sentiments that should be dearer to us than life itself : but it is intolerance which we disapprove ; it is a readiness to condemn others on account of their religious opinions, and to load them with all manner of obloquy. *This*, I say, is what we deprecate ; and too much reason there is to deprecate it ; since the indulgence of this hateful disposition is the common error of all parties. To be fully persuaded in our own minds, after a long course of diligent inquiry, is well ; but to brand persons with opprobrious names, because they see not with our eyes ; and to misrepresent their sentiments, putting into their mouths statements which they never make, and loading their real statements with consequences which they disavow and abhor, is a mode of proceeding which tends only to generate

endless contentions, and to destroy that love which is the sum and substance of all true religion. The liberty which we use ourselves, we should concede to others; and if we think others have adopted erroneous sentiments, we should endeavour to set them right; but we should do it, not with railing accusations, but in kindness and a spirit of love.

But the third rule which we mentioned as deserving our attention, is above all things necessary to be observed: We must *implore of God the enlightening and sanctifying influences of his Spirit, that we may be preserved from error, and be guided into all truth.*—We are all by nature blind to the things of God: there is a veil upon our hearts, precisely as there was in the apostolic age, and still continues to be upon the hearts of the Jews. “The natural man,” says St. Paul, “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Even the discourses of our blessed Lord and Saviour, notwithstanding his confirmation of them by miracles unnumbered, could not convince those who did not choose to be convinced: nor were the Apostles themselves so enlightened by his instructions during the whole time of his ministry upon earth, but that they needed after his resurrection the influences of his Spirit to “open their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures.” The same influence *we* need: we must have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation given to us, to discover to us the things of the Spirit; and, unless “God shine into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” we shall continue in darkness to our dying hour. Of this blindness we should be aware; for, if we are not sensible of our need of the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us, we shall never seek his influences, nor ever be qualified to form a correct judgment of the things which are revealed to us. Even Timothy, long after he had ministered the Gospel with great success, needed not only the

instructions of Paul, but the teachings of the Holy Spirit, to render them effectual: "Consider what I say," says St. Paul to him; "and the Lord give thee understanding in all things."

This need of divine teaching we are all by nature averse to acknowledge. One of the last things that we are brought to confess, is, the insufficiency of our own wisdom to understand the sublime truths of Christianity. But, if we look around us, we see many possessing all the same privileges with ourselves, and yet so blinded by prejudice or passion, as not to discern any one truth aright: the divinity of our blessed Lord, his atonement for sin, the influences of his Spirit, the necessity of a renewed heart, together with many other truths, are boldly denied by them; or, if acknowledged as doctrines that are revealed, they are utterly disregarded as to any practical effect upon the soul. This clearly proves the great truth we are insisting on; namely, that we must all be taught of God, and that, without his teaching, we shall know nothing as we ought to know.

But we observed, that we need the sanctifying, as well as the illuminating, influences of the Holy Spirit: for we have many corrupt affections, which it is the very intention of the Gospel to eradicate; and under the influence of them we lean to those doctrines which tolerate, rather than to those which would mortify and subdue, our favourite propensities. How then can we judge aright whilst we are influenced by such a bias? "Our eye being evil, we shall of necessity be in darkness; and our eye must be made single, before the whole body can be full of light." This single eye then must be given us by the Holy Spirit. Instead of loving darkness rather than light, we must love the light, and come to the light, on purpose that the nature and quality of our actions may be made manifest. Let our first object then be to seek of God the gift of his Holy Spirit (for he has said, that, "if any man lack wisdom, and ask it of him, he will give it liberally, and without upbraiding:") and then, in dependence on the sacred guidance of

the Spirit, let us examine every part of God's word. Let us in particular desire to be conformed to the word as far as we understand it; and then there is no fear but that we shall be guided into all truth, as far at least as shall be necessary for our own personal welfare, and for the transforming of our souls into the image of our God.

We cannot conclude this part of our subject with more appropriate words than those of our excellent Liturgy, in which we entreat you to accompany us from your inmost souls^c: "O Lord, from whom all good things do come; grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

^c Collect for 5th Sunday after Easter.

MDCCCCLXXIV.

ON THE CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE.

1 Cor. x. 15. *I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.*

IN the appeal, which we have proposed to make to your judgment, we shall confine ourselves to things of primary and fundamental importance. We are little disposed to enter upon a field of doubtful disputation: for though we think that every truth in the Holy Scriptures is important, and that some of those points which are more controverted are exceeding valuable, when received rightly, and improved for our advancement in the divine life; yet, as the acceptance or rejection of them may consist with real and vital piety, we gladly wave all consideration of them, it being our wish, not to establish the dogmas of a party, but to bring home to the hearts and consciences of our hearers those principles which constitute the basis of our holy religion.

The very first of these principles is, that man is a

fallen creature, guilty, polluted, helpless. The knowledge of this lies at the root of all true religion. In proportion as this is seen and felt, will the provision made for our recovery by Jesus Christ be valued : and in proportion as persons either overlook, or maintain in theory only, this truth, the whole plan of salvation by Christ will be disregarded and despised.

But the views and sentiments of those who maintain the depravity of our fallen nature are frequently and greatly misrepresented. Injudicious persons, it is true, may speak unguardedly and unadvisedly on this subject, as they may well be expected to do on every subject ; but as the crudities of an ill-informed and violent partisan could not properly be stated as exhibiting a just view of the principles of any government ; so neither can the rash unqualified assertions of the inexperienced be justly imputed to those who promulgate truth in its more sober and measured forms. It were to be wished, indeed, that our opponents would content themselves with statements that may be found : but they far exceed the wildest reveries that have ever issued from any ignorant enthusiast, and represent those who maintain the total depravity of our nature as reducing men to the condition of stocks and stones.

We beg leave therefore to state with some measure of precision what we mean, when we say that man is altogether polluted in every faculty of his soul, and destitute of all true goodness.

We do not mean to say that men may not be *comparatively* good by nature. There is as great a difference between men's natural dispositions as between their intellectual powers. As some children are quick and lively in their apprehension, whilst others are dull and stupid ; so some are mild, affectionate, and generous in their tempers, whilst others are fierce, vindictive, and selfish. The children of the same parents, who have seen only the same examples set before them, are often as different in their dispositions, as if no ground of resemblance had existed between them.

In like manner we concede that persons may be *morally* good, not merely in comparison of others, but to a certain degree really and substantially so : that is, a person may possess by nature such a measure of candour, and benevolence, and integrity, as almost to put to shame those who profess to have been renewed by grace. How much, indeed of these dispositions may arise from education as well as from nature, we are not anxious to inquire : we wish to give to nature as much as can with any shew of reason be claimed for her ; and then to point out that kind and measure of goodness which she never communicated to any man, nor ever enabled any person to attain.

We say then, that no man by nature is *spiritually* good, or good *towards God*. No man by nature loves God, or delights himself in God. No man truly fears him. There may be a superstitious dread of him as an Almighty Being, but no real fear to offend him, no true desire to please and glorify him. No one by nature has, what I may call, a creature-like spirit towards him. No one feels his obligations towards him as his Creator, or places implicit confidence in him as his Preserver, or rejoices in him as his Benefactor, or delights to execute his will as his Governor, or labours to approve himself to him as his Judge. *A spirit of independence* pervades every child of Adam, and is, perhaps beyond every thing else, the great effect and evidence of our apostasy from God. Self-will, self-seeking, self-confidence, self-complacency, are but so many branches issuing from this root. The loss of that creature-like spirit which possessed the mind of Adam in Paradise, is absolutely universal. Whatever differences there may be between men as to their *moral* dispositions, there is none in this : self has usurped the place of God, and is to every man by nature the principle and end of all his actions.

As we have no longer by nature a creature-like spirit, so neither have we, what, if we may be allowed the expression, we would call, a sinner-like spirit. It

might be supposed, that the universal fruit of our fall should be contrition, and self-lothing, and self-abhorrence; and that, a way having been revealed for our restoration to God's favour, we should be occupied day and night in the grateful contemplation of it, and in the pursuit of so inestimable a blessing. But here again we are all upon a par: the men of finer clay and more exquisite workmanship, are here on a level with vessels of the most base materials and most degraded use. A spirit of humiliation is never found, but as it is infused into the soul by the Spirit of God. It might be supposed, that the desire of obtaining reconciliation with God should stimulate every child of man to earnest inquiries after a Saviour, and to grateful thanksgivings to God for the unspeakable gift of his only dear Son. But so far are these feelings from being the natural growth of the human heart, that they are never formed in the heart but with great difficulty, nor ever preserved alive there but with constant vigilance and unremitting exertions. We do indeed read of a Samuel, a Josiah, a Timothy, sanctified from an early period of life: but this was not in consequence of any natural piety in them any more than in others; but in consequence of peculiar operations of divine grace upon their souls.

Connected with this want of a sinner-like spirit, is a love of sin in all its branches. We say again, there is not in every man the same *predominance* of sin in all its branches; but the same *propensity to it* there is: the *seed* of every evil lies buried in our fallen nature: in some it acquires more strength than in others, and manifests itself by more hateful fruits; but in all it lives, it vegetates, and, if circumstances were to arise to call it forth, would grow up to maturity in one as well as in another.

Thus we have delivered our sentiments on the corruption of man's nature; and we will add a few words respecting that which is so intimately connected with it—our natural inability to do any thing that is good.

When a nature is so depraved, as ours from the foregoing statement appears to be, there can be no disposition to any thing truly and spiritually good : on the contrary, there must be an aversion to what is good, and, in consequence of that, an incapacity to engage successfully in the prosecution or performance of any good thing. But here we beg to be distinctly understood, that the incapacity to do any thing that is good is a *moral*, and *not a physical*, incapacity. A man is not under the same *kind* of incapacity to stop the progress of his corruptions that he is to stop the sun in its course : it is because of his inveterate inclination to evil, and aversion to what is good, that he cannot bring the powers of his mind to bear on the prosecution of any thing that is truly and spiritually good ; if he had the inclination and the desire, his exertions would be proportioned to the extent of those desires : and though we are far from saying that those exertions would be sufficient of themselves for the accomplishment of his object, they would certainly be accompanied with power from on high, and such a power too as should render them effectual for the desired end. It is the want of these pious inclinations that keeps us from looking unto God for his effectual aid ; and consequently from attaining that strength, whereby alone we can subdue and mortify our natural corruptions.

When therefore we say, that man is by nature altogether helpless, and incapable of doing any thing that is good, we wish it to be borne in mind, what the incapacity is of which we speak. Were it an incapacity that rendered all exertion nugatory, man's responsibility for his actions would, as far as relates to that point, be at an end ; but our incapacity arising altogether from the inveteracy of our love to sin, and the total alienation of our hearts from what is truly good, it ceases to be an extenuation of our guilt, and becomes rather an aggravation of it.

We have now spoken what will be sufficient to mark our sentiments respecting the corruption and helplessness of fallen man. We say of man, that he

is altogether destitute of every thing that is truly and spiritually good, and altogether prone to evil; though, in respect of the visible fruits of evil, there is a considerable difference between one and another. We say too that man is incapable of doing any thing that is truly and spiritually good; but that his incapacity arises, not from any want of physical powers, but of moral and spiritual dispositions. He has the same power to exercise his mind in one thing as in another, if he have the inclination and desire so to do; the fault is in his will, which is averse to good, and in his affections, which are set on evil. At the same time, whatever be the state of a man's will and affections, he has not in himself the power to do the will of God; for that end he must be strengthened by the Spirit of God: but that aid no man shall want, who seeks it from God in spirit and in truth.

And now I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say: Is there any thing extravagant in this statement? Is there any thing that can warrant such representations as are too often given of the sentiments of those who maintain the doctrines above considered? We speak not as to wise men only, but as to men of candour and liberality, of truth and equity: is there any thing here which is not most decidedly declared in the Holy Scriptures? Is there any thing which is not sanctioned and confirmed by all the authentic records of the doctrines of our Church?

Let us briefly institute this inquiry, in order that the truth of our statement may yet more abundantly appear.

What saith the Scripture? The testimony of the Most High God is this, that when he looked down from heaven to behold the children of men, he saw "that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that *every imagination* of the thoughts of man's heart was *only evil continually*." Can the total corruption of our nature be stated in stronger terms than these? But it will be more satisfactory,

perhaps, to refer to a passage where an inspired Apostle is establishing the very point in question. Look we then to the third chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and let us hear what he says. He is proving that all mankind, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under sin; and in support of his assertions he brings together a whole cloud of witnesses: "It is written," says he, "There is none good, no, not one: there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God: they are all gone out of the way: they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one^b." Have we spoken any thing stronger than this? Yet, in a subsequent chapter, the Apostle speaks in stronger language still: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be^c." In another Epistle he denies the power of any man by nature even so much as to know the things of the Spirit; "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned^d." Nor does he confine these assertions to any particular age or nation: he says of himself and his fellow Apostles, that even they, in their unregenerate state, "fulfilled the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were *by nature* children of wrath, even as others^e." Even after he was regenerate, he still speaks of himself, so far as he was yet unrenewed, as destitute of all good; "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing."

We think that this will abundantly suffice for the confirmation of our sentiments from Scripture. The person that will not be convinced by these passages, would not be convinced even though we were to multiply quotations to ever so great an extent.

Turn we then to what, with this assembly at least, must have considerable weight, I mean the authentic records of the doctrines of our Church. In the 9th

^b Rom. iii. 9—12.

^c Rom. viii. 7.

^d 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^e Eph. ii. 3.

article, intitled "Original or Birth Sin," it is said, "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of *every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam*, whereby man is *very far* gone from original righteousness, and is *of his own nature inclined to evil*, so that the flesh lusteth *always* contrary to the spirit; and therefore *in every person born into this world* it deserveth God's wrath and damnation." Then, in reference to the impotency of man to do any thing that is truly good, it is said in the next article, "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God: wherefore we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

We forbear to comment on these articles, because all of us can refer to them and examine them for ourselves: but there is an end of all certainty in language if these articles do not affirm all that we have expressed in the foregoing statement. The homilies of our Church speak in numberless passages to the same effect. In that for Whit-Sunday, it is said, "Man of his own nature is fleshly and carnal, corrupt and naught, sinful and disobedient to God, *without any spark of goodness in him*, (mark these words, "*without any spark of goodness in him*") without any virtuous or godly motion, only given to evil thoughts and wicked deeds." And in our Liturgy, our helplessness is stated in terms equally strong; in the Collect for the second Sunday in Lent, we address the Deity in the following words; "Almighty God, who seest that we have *no power of ourselves to help ourselves*" — — —

It would occupy too much time if we were to multiply quotations on these subjects. The Articles, the Homilies, the Liturgy, all abound with expressions to the same effect; so that no man can read them

with candour, and doubt what the sentiments of our reformers were on these subjects.

But we will bring the matter still nearer home, and agree to have the point determined by every man's own experience. Let every one of us look back to the earliest period of his life, and see what have been his dispositions towards God. Did we, in proportion as our rational powers were expanded, employ them in the contemplation of God as our Creator, our Benefactor, our Redeemer, and our Judge? Have we felt an unfeigned solicitude to please him, and to glorify his name? Has every thing that is contrary to his will been hateful in our eyes, and has it been shunned by us with abhorrence? Has it been our delight to draw nigh to him from day to day in the exercise of prayer and praise, and to implore help from him that we may mortify every corrupt affection, and be gradually transformed into his image in righteousness and true holiness? Nay, we will go no farther than this very day, and ask, Whether such were the exercises of our minds when we rose from our beds, and whether we find it an easy matter to preserve our minds in such a frame as this? Do we not find, that the things of time and sense thrust out all these holy affections, and that God, instead of being the one object before our eyes, is scarcely to be found in all our thoughts? I speak as to wise men, and to men of integrity; Declare the truth before God: Say whether or not ye yourselves are fallen from God? Say whether piety be the natural produce of your souls? Say whether you find holy and heavenly thoughts, or carnal and earthly thoughts, have the readier entertainment in your minds? Say whether or not ye are impotent to good; or go and try it when you leave this place: Go, and say with yourselves, 'I will bring my own mind to a state of deep humiliation for my past sins; I will exercise lively gratitude to God for his sparing mercy hitherto; I will look with steadfast faith to Christ as my only and all-sufficient Saviour; and I will rejoice and delight in him as my present portion, and my eternal

great reward.' Do this; do it, not for a constancy, but only for the remainder of this day; and then will we confess, that all that we have spoken is a libel upon human nature, and that man is neither so corrupt nor so helpless as the Scriptures and the writings of our reformers have represented him. Whatever may be thought of all our preceding observations, it must surely be acknowledged fair, when we leave every man to be his own accuser, and constitute him judge in his own cause. I repeat it; this is the tribunal to which we make our appeal, and by your own impartial judgment we will venture to abide.

Anticipating your decision, (for we doubt not but that the faithful monitor within you has already pronounced it,) we ground on your own acknowledgments a

“WORD OF EXHORTATION”—

First, if we are such corrupt and helpless creatures, let us seek to obtain a deep and abiding sense of our wretched condition. What ought we to feel, who have lived as without God in the world, who have exalted to his throne all the vanities of time and sense, and have, in fact, been a god unto ourselves, doing our own will, finding our own pleasure, and seeking our own glory? What, I say, ought such persons to feel? What view ought they to have of their own conduct? Is it a small measure of humiliation and contrition that befits such persons? Take into the account also what blessings that God, whom we have so neglected, has from time to time been pouring out upon us; and let us reflect, above all, on his incomprehensible love in giving his only-begotten Son to die for us, and in following us incessantly with offers of a free and full salvation through him: think, moreover, of the strivings of his Holy Spirit with us from time to time, and of the resistance which we have opposed to his sacred motions; reflect, I say, on these things, and then say, Whether our eyes ought not to be a fountain of tears to run down night and day for all our iniquities and abominations.

Indeed it is not a mere sigh that the occasion calls for; nor is it a few heartless acknowledgments that will suffice: the very best of us has need to smite on his breast with anguish of heart, and to cry from his inmost soul, God be merciful to me a sinner! Nothing less than this will in any respect answer the demands of our offended God: it is the broken and contrite spirit alone which he will not despise. O let us seek to humble ourselves aright! Let us implore help from God, who alone can take away the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh: let us look to Jesus our ascended Saviour, who is exalted to give repentance as well as remission of sins; and let us entreat of him so to discover to us the enormity of our guilt, that we may mourn and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.

In the next place, if such be our guilt and helplessness, let us not only humble ourselves for it, but seek for the remission of our sins in Jesus' blood. O, thanks be to God! "there is a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness:" there is a Saviour, "whose blood will cleanse from all sin," and "who is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." He has made reconciliation for us through the blood of his cross; and through his sacrifice and intercession we may yet find acceptance with our offended God. In his righteousness we may be clothed; and, arrayed in that, we shall stand before God "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, yea, holy, and without blemish." We do indeed, in the first place, urge the necessity of repentance: but no man must rest in his repentance, however deep it may be: the offender, under the law, not only confessed his sins over his sacrifice, but laid them upon the head of the victim. So must we do; we must transfer all our sins to the head of our Great Sacrifice; and he, like the scape-goat, will carry them all away to the land of oblivion.

Lastly: Let us seek to be renewed in our hearts by the influence of the Holy Spirit. He is justly called in our Catechism, "the Sanctifier of all the elect people of God." It is he who must "give us

both to will and to do ;” and if we set ourselves in earnest to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling,” we need not fear but that he will help our infirmities, and his grace shall be sufficient for us. Polluted as we are, we should yet be sanctified throughout in body, soul, and spirit, if only we would plead in earnest for his renewing influence : and, helpless as we are, we should yet be strengthened with might by his agency in our inward man, and be enabled to do all things through his gracious communications.

This is the true use of Christian principles. To acknowledge the extent of our fall, is of no use, unless we seek for a recovery through the sacrifice of our Redeemer, and through the influence of the Eternal Spirit. Let us but apply these remedies ; and all aversion to see the depth of our guilt and misery will vanish instantly. We shall be in no fear of being too much depressed by a sense of our sin ; but shall rather desire to know the full extent of our malady, that God may be the more glorified in our restoration to health. And if indeed we are disposed to implore help from God, then may we profitably sum up our requests in the words of that truly scriptural Collect, “Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the Spirit to think, and do always such things as be rightful ; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may, by thee, be enabled to live according to thy will, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen^a.”

^a Ninth Sunday after Trinity.

MDCCCCLXXV.

ON THE NEW BIRTH.

1 Cor. x. 15. *I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say.*

THE subject to which we would now draw your attention, and which is most intimately connected with that of our fallen state, and of our depravity by nature, is the doctrine of the New Birth. It has been already shewn, that we are altogether born in sin,

and corrupt in all our faculties; and it is obvious, that a great change must pass upon our souls before we can be meet for the enjoyment of those heavenly mansions, where no unclean thing can enter.

In order to invalidate this doctrine, occasion has been taken from the use of the word *παλιγγενεσία*, which we translate regeneration, to confound this doctrine with baptism. The argument used is this: The word *παλιγγενεσία* occurs but twice in the Scriptures, and neither time has it any thing to do with that spiritual change which enthusiasts insist upon as necessary to our salvation. One of the times it is used in reference to baptism, and is expressly distinguished from the renewing of the Holy Ghost; as when it is said “God hath saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost^a:” and the other time, it has nothing to do either with baptism or the new birth, but refers to a totally distinct subject.

Now we grant, that this particular term, “the washing of regeneration,” is here used as our objector states: and we also grant, that if nothing more were said in Scripture respecting a new birth than what is expressed under that particular term, there would be very great weight in the objection. But the doctrine of the new birth is not at all founded on the use of that particular term. The term regeneration, indeed, has a peculiar fitness to express the being *born again*: and when it is so peculiarly fit for this purpose, we cannot but think that the non-application of it to the subject in the Holy Scriptures, would be a very weak argument against the doctrine itself, when that doctrine is expressed as clearly as possible by various other terms of the same import. However, we wish not to contend about a *word*: it is not *words*, but *things*, that we insist upon; and therefore, waving the use of that particular term, we shall speak in the common phraseology of Scripture, of being “born again,” or “born from above,” or “born of God.”

But that we may leave no room for misapprehension

^a Tit. iii. 5.

respecting our sentiments, we shall begin with stating what we do *not* mean, when we insist upon the doctrine of the new birth.

It is supposed by many, and indeed affirmed by some, that we require a *sudden* impulse of the Holy Spirit, which, *without any co-operation on the part of man*, is to convert the soul to God; and that we require this change to be so *sensibly and perceptibly* wrought, that the subject of it shall be able to specify the day and hour when it took place.

But all this we utterly disclaim. We say, indeed, that God *may* effect his work in any way that he pleases; and that, if he choose to convert men now, precisely as he did the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, or as he did the persecuting Saul on his way to Damascus, he is at liberty to do it; and no man in the universe is authorised to say that he *cannot*, or *shall* not, or *will* not, do it. But we never require any thing of the kind: we require nothing *sudden*. It may be so gradual, as that the growth of it, like the seed in the parable, shall at no time be particularly visible, either to the observation of others, or to the person's own mind: "it shall spring and grow up, he knoweth not how^b." We deny that we ever speak of it as wrought by an *irresistible* impulse of the Spirit, or without the co-operation of the man himself: for that man is in all cases a free agent: he is never wrought upon as a mere machine. He is drawn, indeed, but it is with the *ords of a man*; that is, by considerations proper to influence a rational being, and by feelings which those considerations excite in his soul. He is influenced by hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, just as any other man is; only the Spirit of God takes away from his heart that veil which was upon it (and thereby enables the man to see both temporal and eternal things in their true light, according to their relative importance); and then inclines the heart to act agreeably to the dictates of sound judgment. *How far* the Spirit of God works, and *how far* the mind of man, is a point which no

^b Mark iv. 27.

human being can determine; but that "God gives us both to will and to do," we are certain, since "every good and perfect gift cometh down from him." But at the same time we know, that man *does* and *must* "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling;" and so far is the Divine agency from being a reason for neglect on man's part, that it is the great motive and encouragement which God himself affords him to activity and exertion^c.

Thus we have endeavoured to guard against the misrepresentations with which this subject is usually disguised and deformed.

We now come to state what our views of the subject really are:—

We have before shewn, that man by nature has nothing in him that is *spiritually* good, or good *towards* God. But in order to be made meet for heaven, he must be made spiritually good; that is, he must love what God loves, and hate what God hates; and be, and do, what God commands. Does God hate sin in all its branches? he must hate it too, and lothe and abhor himself for having ever committed it. Does God love holiness? he also must love a holy God, and holy exercises, and holy affections; and must so love holy things, as to make them the continual objects of his most earnest pursuit: in relation to every thing that is holy and heavenly, "the same mind must be in him that was in Christ Jesus." Has God required him to come as a weary and heavy-laden sinner to Jesus, and to live altogether by faith in Christ, for wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; and to glory, not in any human strength or goodness, but wholly and exclusively in the Lord Jesus Christ? the man's mind must be brought to this, and Christ must be exceeding precious to him in all these points of view; yea, he must "determine to know nothing, and to rejoice in nothing, but Christ and him crucified." These views and these principles must not rest as mere notions in the head, but must be wrought into the

^c Phil. ii. 12, 13.

heart, and exhibited in the whole of the life and conversation.

Before we proceed, we will beg leave to ask, Is this, or is it not, a reasonable statement and a reasonable requirement? I speak as unto wise men; and I call upon you to judge, as in the sight of God, whether these requirements can justly be branded with enthusiasm, or severity, or any odious character whatever?

But to proceed:—This change far exceeds the power of fallen man. Whatever powers you may be pleased to invest him with, they fall very far short of this. A semblance of these things he may put on; but he cannot form them really and truly in his heart. This is the work of the Spirit of God, who is promised to us for this very end: “A new heart will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh: and I will put MY SPIRIT within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my commandments to do them^d.” As to the mode of effecting this great work, we have already observed, the Spirit is not restricted: but whenever it is truly effected, then we say, that the man is born again, and born of the Spirit; and the change that has taken place within him, we call the new birth.

Now the question is, Whether this be the new birth or not? and whether we do right in insisting upon it as necessary to man’s salvation?

In answer to this, we reply, not only that the Scriptures call this a new birth, a new creation, a being born of God, and a being born of the Spirit, but that an experience of it is predicated of all who are in a state of favour with God now, or shall find admission into his kingdom hereafter. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, or a new creation,” says the Apostle: “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new^e.” And

^d Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27.

^e 2 Cor. v. 17.

our Lord, with repeated asseverations, says to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God^f."

These declarations of our Lord to Nicodemus are peculiarly strong; because the import of them cannot with any appearance of reason be explained away. Some indeed have endeavoured to explain this of baptism; but I wish that those, who think it can bear that construction, would see what sense they can on that supposition make of the whole context. Let us suppose for a moment that baptism is the new birth, and that baptism was the point which our Lord so strongly insisted on; Why should our Lord, when explaining and enforcing his first assertion, so carefully distinguish between water-baptism, and the operations of the Holy Spirit; "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water *and of the Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God?" Here, admitting that he insisted on the necessity of being born of water, he insisted also on being born of the Spirit, in order that he might convince Nicodemus that he spoke, not of an outward and carnal, but of an inward and spiritual, change. Again—How can his subsequent explanations apply to baptism? On the supposition that he speaks of a spiritual birth, his reasons are clear and forcible; "that which is born of the flesh, is flesh:" and therefore unfit for a spiritual kingdom: but "that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit," and exactly suited to that kingdom which he was about to establish. Again—If it were baptism of which he speaks, what connexion has that with the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, and which, though inexplicable in some respects, is invariably and infallibly to be seen in its effects? If it were baptism, it would blow, not where the Spirit listeth, but where the parents and the minister list: and as for its effects, they are for the most part visible to no human being. Moreover, how could our Lord with justice ask Nicodemus, "Art thou a master in

^f John iii. 3—5.

Israel, and knowest not these things?" Nicodemus might have well replied, 'Yes, I am a master in Israel, and yet know not these things: for how should I know them? Where are they revealed? What is there in the writings of Moses or the prophets that should have taught me to expect so much from baptism? God required the circumcision of the flesh, as you do baptism: but he required the circumcision of the heart also: and, if there be a spiritual change of a similar nature required of us under your dispensation, and that be the thing which you call a new birth, then I confess I ought to have had clearer views of these things, since they were evidently inculcated in the Jewish Scriptures, and were represented also as particularly characterizing the Messiah's reign.'

It were much to be wished, that those who will have baptism to be the new birth would take this passage, and try what sense they can make of it according to their interpretation. Prejudice doubtless is so strong as to be convinced by nothing; but I should marvel if a person possessed of a simple and unsophisticated mind, could withstand the evidence that would arise from this one passage alone.

But as some distinguished characters are very strong and positive upon this point, we think it not improper to enter somewhat more fully into it.

That we may not be misunderstood either in relation to what we conceive to be their sentiments, or what we would maintain in opposition to them, we will state precisely what it is in their views which we disapprove, and which we conceive it is of great importance to correct.

If by the term regeneration they meant an introduction into a new *state*, in which the baptized persons have a right and title to all the blessings of salvation, we should have no controversy with them.

If they meant that all adults, who in the exercise of penitence and faith are baptized into Christ, have in that ordinance the remission of their sins sealed

to them, and the Holy Spirit in a more abundant measure communicated to them, we should not disagree with them.

If they meant that infants dedicated to God in baptism *may* and sometimes *do* (though in a way not discoverable by us, except by the fruits) receive a new nature from the Spirit of God *in*, and *with*, and *by* that ordinance, we could cordially join with them.

But they go much farther than all this; and assert, that *all persons* do *necessarily* by a divine appointment receive the Holy Ghost in such a manner and degree as really to be changed in the spirit of their minds into the very image of God in righteousness and true holiness, and so to partake of the Divine nature, that they never need afterwards to seek so great a change again. *This* we are constrained to combat as a fundamental error: and respecting it, we now, in humility and a spirit of love, venture to make our appeal to you.

Is the new birth so identified with baptism as to be universally and necessarily attendant on it?

To determine this question, let us examine what is said of the *new birth* in Scripture, and what of *baptism*.

Hear what is said of *the new birth*: "Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world." "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

Strong as this is, the same is yet more confidently expressed in another place: "We *know*, that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not^s. Now we ask, Is this true of all that are baptized? Do they invariably, from the moment of their baptism, overcome the world? Do they never (willingly and habitually) commit sin? and are they incapable of so sinning because they are baptized? Do they so keep themselves, that the wicked one toucheth them not? I speak as to wise and candid, yea, as to honest, men; and ask,

§ 1 John v. 18.

Whether in your consciences you can affirm such things of baptism; and, Whether, if you cannot, the new birth must not be a thing very different from baptism? I will even abide by the testimony which every individual must give of himself: *you* have all been baptized: but have you all overcome the world? Are you all in such a state that you cannot knowingly and habitually commit sin? And have you so kept yourselves, that the wicked one does not touch you? Was there ever such a period in your lives? If there was, when was it? How long did it last? Why did you not continue it? Why are you not panting after it, and labouring for it again? But you know in your own hearts that there are millions of baptized persons of whom these things are not true, nor ever were true; and that consequently the new birth must be a very different thing from baptism.

Now then let us inquire also what is said of *baptism*. It is said, "Our Lord baptized no man."—But was he not the means of any being born to God? It is said by Paul, that "God did not send him to baptize, but to preach the Gospel:" but was he not sent to beget souls to God through the Gospel? He goes further, and says, "I thank God I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius." But would he have accounted it a proper ground of thanksgiving, if he had been instrumental to the conversion of no more than these? He tells us of *many* whom he had begotten by the Gospel, and who were his sons in the faith: and therefore we are sure, that there is a birth effected by the Word and Spirit of God, that is totally distinct from baptism.

How can we account for it, that men, in the face of all this evidence, should maintain, as they do, this fatal error? In some cases it is to be feared, that, being averse to seek the spiritual change of which the Scriptures speak, they are glad to lay hold on any error that shall lull their consciences asleep, and sanction their continuance in an unconverted state. But with some we hope, that there is really an error

of judgment arising from the strong things which are spoken of baptism in the Holy Scriptures. They do not consider, that, when it is said, "Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins:" those words were addressed to adults, who had just been informed, that Jesus was the Christ, and that, if they believed in him, and became his disciples, their sins should be blotted out. Expressions of this kind were highly proper as addressed to adults; but afford no ground for the idea, that the rite of baptism is the new birth. We are no more disposed to detract from the honour of that sacred ordinance than our adversaries themselves: we admit, and beg you to bear in mind our admission, that great, exceeding great, benefit accrues to the soul from baptism. In many instances, where the ordinance is really attended upon in faith, and prayer is offered up to God in faith, we do believe that God bestows a peculiar blessing on the child: and, though we cannot ascertain that he does so but by the fruits that are afterwards produced, yet are we warranted from Scripture to believe, that the effectual fervent prayer of righteous people shall not go forth in vain; and that "whatsoever we ask, believing, we shall receive." But even from the ordinance itself we may consider great good as arising to the soul; since, as in the case of circumcision, the person is thereby brought into covenant with God. The Israelites, as a nation in covenant with God, were highly privileged: for "to them," as the Apostle says, "belonged the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises^b." The same, I doubt not, may be justly said of all that are baptized: indeed, we doubt not, but that our Reformers had that very passage of Scripture in their eye, when in our baptismal service they instructed us to thank God for having regenerated the baptized person by his Holy Spirit; and, in our Catechism, to speak of children as by the ordinance of baptism made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

^b Rom. ix. 4.

These expressions are doubtless strong; and so are St. Paul's expressions respecting the benefits of circumcision: and every blessing which he asserts to have been conveyed by circumcision, we may safely and truly apply to baptism. By the very admission of persons into covenant with God, they are brought into a *new state*, have a *right and title* to all these privileges; and by the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ they come to the actual possession of them.

We hope we shall not be considered as degrading our subject, if we attempt to present it more clearly to your minds, by an easy and familiar illustration. The subject is confessedly difficult; and if we can by any means simplify it, we shall render an important service to those who wish to understand it. Take then a well-known ordinance from the laws of our own land. A person, to whom property has been bequeathed, has a right and title to it from the moment of the testator's death: but he cannot take possession, and have the full enjoyment of it, till he has complied with the due forms and requisitions of the law: so a baptized person has a right and title to all the blessings of the Christian covenant as soon as he is baptized; but he must comply with the requisitions of the Gospel, and exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, before he can have the complete enjoyment of them. We do not mean to lay any great stress on this illustration; we are aware it is far from complete; and we particularly desire that it may not be pressed beyond the occasion for which it is used; but we conceive that, imperfect as it is, it may serve to throw some light upon a subject, which has been, and yet is, a source of perplexity to many.

But the chief source of the fore-mentioned error is, that men do not distinguish between a change of *state* and a change of *nature*. Baptism is, as we have just shewn, a change of *state*: for by it we become entitled to all the blessings of the new covenant; but it is not a change of *nature*. A change of nature *may* be communicated at the time that the ordinance is administered; but the ordinance

itself does not communicate it now, any more than in the apostolic age. Simon Magus was baptized; and yet remained in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, as much after his baptism as he was before. And so it may be with us: And this is an infallible proof, that the change, which the Scriptures call the new birth, does not always and of necessity accompany this sacred ordinance. As the circumcision of the heart did not always accompany the circumcision of the flesh, so neither does the renovation of the soul always accompany the outward rite of baptism, which shadows it forth; and if only our opponents will distinguish the sign from the thing signified, and assign to each its proper place and office, there will be an immediate end of this controversy.

But it will not be amiss to examine briefly the different tendencies of these opposite doctrines, and to ascertain their comparative worth; in point of *sobriety*; in point of *practical efficacy*; and, lastly, in reference to their *final issue*.

Which has the preference in point of *sobriety*; the doctrine of a new and spiritual birth, by the operation of the Spirit of God; or that of baptism being the new birth? It is objected to the former doctrine, that it is enthusiastic, and that it is accompanied with many absurd and baneful errors; namely, that its advocates insist on sudden impulses, which irresistibly, and without any co-operation on our parts, at some particular time that may at all subsequent periods be referred to, convert the soul to God. Now we have before denied that the advocates for the new birth give any such representation of it, or that it is in its own nature associated with any such things. But now observe the doctrine of our adversaries; namely, of those who identify baptism with the new birth: it is curious to observe to what an extent they fall into the very errors which they impute to us. They say, that we are born again in baptism, consequently, they,

First, make our new birth *sudden*.

Next, they make it *irresistible* ; for the child cannot withstand the power of the priest.

Next, they make it *without any co-operation on our part* ; for the child is wholly passive.

Next, they make it *arbitrary according to the will of man* ; who may hasten it, or delay it, or prevent it, exactly as he pleases : whereas it is expressly said of all Christians, that they are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of Godⁱ.”

Next, they make it so *determinable in point of time*, that not the person himself only, but the whole world also, may know it, by consulting the register where the ceremony is recorded.

And, lastly, they are *assured of it, not only without any evidence at all, but in the very face of all imaginable evidence to the contrary*.

Who, I would ask, are the enthusiasts now? I will further ask, Whether the wildest fanatic that can be found at this day in Christendom entertains notions half so fanatical as these?

The Jews laid great and unscriptural stress on circumcision : but did they ever say that the circumcision of the flesh was the same as the circumcision of the heart? Or do our advocates for baptismal regeneration give credit either to the ancient or modern Jews, as actually born again by the rite of circumcision? The Jews did indeed think that all the circumcised among them would be saved ; but it was on other grounds : it was from an idea that, as children of Abraham, they could not perish, being all of necessity interested in the covenant made with him and his seed : but never, as far as we know, did they so confound the sign with the thing signified, as to imagine, that they were of necessity made new creatures by the operation of God upon their souls, at the time that man performed a painful operation on their bodies.

But let us also examine the two opinions in reference to their *practical efficacy*. What is the tendency

ⁱ John i. 13.

of the doctrine which requires men to seek from God an entire change both of heart and life ; and declares them to be incapable of entering into the kingdom of heaven till they have experienced this change ? Its tendency manifestly is to awaken men from their slumbers in the way of sin, and to stir them up to seek a conformity to God in righteousness and true holiness. But what is the tendency of the doctrine that identifies baptism with the new birth ? Is it not to lull men asleep in their evil ways ; to make them think that they do not need a new nature, but only a little reformation of some things, which may easily be amended whenever they please ? I ask any candid man, Are not these the true and natural tendencies of the two opposite doctrines ? and do not these tendencies strongly mark which of the two is right ?

Lastly ; Let us view them in reference to their *final issue*.—Suppose that the doctrine of baptismal regeneration should prove erroneous, what will be the consequence to those who, having relied upon it as true, have never sought that spiritual birth which we maintain to be necessary to salvation ? According to their own principles, they must perish : for, let it be remembered, that our opponents maintain the necessity of a new birth as well as we ; only they maintain that they experienced it in their baptism. But suppose that our doctrine prove erroneous ; shall we perish because we were fearful that we had not yet attained that new birth, and continued with all diligence to seek it after we had actually attained it ? The worst that could in that case be said, would be, that we had given ourselves some unnecessary concern and trouble : but our very opponents must acknowledge, that by that diligence we had “made our calling and election sure ;” yea, if I may be allowed such an expression, we had made it *doubly* sure. Can any one who considers this, sit down contentedly with the doubtful notion of having been regenerated in his baptism, and not exert himself to put the matter beyond a doubt ? The pains used to obtain a new and spiritual birth will injure no man : but a neglect

to seek it, from the idea of its having been imparted in baptism, will, if that idea be erroneous, plunge us into irremediable and endless misery. Which alternative, then, will any man of wisdom, yea, of common prudence, choose?

I think, enough has been said to shew what the new birth really is, and that it must be sought and experienced by all who would find admittance into the kingdom of heaven.

But we will yet further confirm what has been said, by two or three passages of Scripture, which bear directly upon the question, and shew us the danger of listening to such delusions as are set in opposition to the truth which we are insisting on. "All are not Israel," says St. Paul, "who are of Israel^k;" or, in other words, all are not true Christians who are nominally so. Again, "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature^l." Here substitute the term baptism for the corresponding rite of circumcision, and you have in one single sentence every word that we have spoken. Once more: "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God^m." Can there be plainer language than this? O that we may not trifle with God, and our own souls! It is an easy matter to adopt an opinion, and to maintain it in opposition to the most convincing statements: but we cannot change the truth of God; nor, when we have passed into the eternal world, can we come back to rectify our errors. We may laugh at the new birth, and persuade ourselves that we have no need to be alarmed at the declarations of the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to it; but we cannot make him open the kingdom of heaven to us when once the door is shut: we may knock, and say, Lord, I thought my baptism was

^k Rom. ix. 6.

^l Gal. vi. 15.

^m Rom. ii. 28, 29.

sufficient : but he will say, ‘ Depart, I never knew you : My words were plain enough, if you had desired to understand them ; but you did not choose to let go your beloved lusts ; you did not choose to give yourselves up to me in newness of heart and life ; and therefore you would “ believe any lie ” rather than comply with my word : Depart, therefore, and reap for ever the fruit of your own delusions.’

And now let me once more appeal to you as men of wisdom and integrity, whether your own experience does not confirm every word that I have spoken ? Are not many of you sensible, that, notwithstanding your baptism, you have never been so born again, as to be brought out of darkness into light, and to be turned from the power of Satan unto God ? Are you not sensible at this very hour, that it is not the one labour of your souls to walk as Christ walked, and to obtain an entire renovation of your souls after the Divine image ? In a word, Do you not find the current of your affections still running, agreeably to the bias of your corrupt nature, after the things of time and sense, instead of flowing, contrary to nature, upwards to high and heavenly things ? If so, the point is clear : you have an evidence within yourselves where the truth lies. Notwithstanding your baptism, you are yet unrenewed ; you are yet in your sins ; and you are lost for ever, if you die in your present state. O cry mightily to God for the gift of his Holy Spirit, and for the influence of his converting grace ! Pray, as David did, “ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” Then shall you know by your own happy experience, what it is to be born again ; and in due time shall you be partakers of the inheritance to which you are born, even “ that inheritance, which is incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

MDCCCCLXXVI.

ON JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH.

1 Cor. x. 15. *I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say.*

IF there be any one question of more importance than all others, it is this, “How shall a man be just with God?” Many errors in relation to other points may be entertained in the mind, and yet our final salvation not be affected by them: but an error in reference to this undermines the foundation of our hopes, and will involve our souls in everlasting ruin. We are anxious therefore to state, with all the precision in our power, what we apprehend to be the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures respecting the grounds of a sinner’s acceptance before God. And here we are peculiarly solicitous to bespeak your candour; because there are in the world so many misconceptions, not to say, misrepresentations also, of the views of those who maintain the doctrine of justification by faith only.

It is thought by some, that we make faith to consist in a strong persuasion of the mind that we are in the favour of God: but we are far from entertaining any such opinion. Whatever is founded on a mere persuasion of our own minds, is a baseless fabric, a fatal delusion. The only warrant for a sinner’s hope, is the written word of God: and that word is the same, whether it come suddenly to our minds, and excite in us an assurance of our interest in it, or be brought more gradually to our view, and be received with fear and trembling. The promises made to repenting and believing sinners are, I say, independent of any frames or feelings of ours; and are the only legitimate ground of our hope in God: and a simple reliance on them, and on Christ as revealed in them, we call *faith*.

What we mean by being *justified* by faith, we shall also explain in few words.

We all, as sinners, are obnoxious to the wrath of God: but the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth in the

Gospel, as having by his own obedience unto death obtained eternal redemption for us. To him we are commanded to look as to the propitiation offered for the sins of the whole world : and we are assured, that, on our doing this with penitence and faith, “we shall be justified from all things, from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses.” With this command we comply : we look to God as reconciled to us in the Son of his love ; and in the exercise of this faith we become interested in all that Christ has done and suffered for us. Our iniquities are blotted out as a morning cloud ; the righteousness of Christ is given to us, and put upon us ; and, arrayed in that spotless robe, we stand before God without spot or blemish. Thus are we accepted in the beloved, or, in other words, are justified by faith.

We will also add a few words, to declare what we mean when we say, that we are justified by faith *without works*. We do not mean that a justified person is at liberty to neglect good works ; but that the person who seeks for acceptance through Christ must not bring with him any works whatever, either ceremonial or moral, as a joint ground of his hope, or as a price which he is to pay for an interest in Christ. He must, *in point of dependence*, renounce his best works as much as the greatest sins he ever committed : his trust must be altogether in the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here it will be proper just to mention a mistake which some have fallen into, respecting the works which are so carefully excluded by St. Paul from the office of justifying : It is said, that wherever works are mentioned as not justifying the sinner, the expression used is, “ *The works of the law* :” and that therefore we may conclude, that not works in *general* are excluded from this office, but only the works of the *ceremonial law*. But the truth is, that “ works ” are *often* mentioned in this view, without any notice of the law ; and the inference drawn from this unfounded assertion only shews, how hard the adversaries of the doctrine we are insisting upon find it to reconcile

their opinions, in any plausible manner, with the statements of St. Paul. Let one passage suffice to settle this point. It is said (where the point in question is expressly debated), "If Abraham were justified by *works*, he hath whereof to glory." But what works could the Apostle mean? Those of the ceremonial law? The ceremonial law was not promulgated till four hundred and thirty years after the time that Abraham was justified; and, consequently, the works which are spoken of as incapable of justifying him, were not those of the ceremonial law, but works *generally*, of any kind whatever.

To make known our views, then, in few words: We consider justification as an act of sovereign grace and mercy, vouchsafed to sinners, on account of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and suffered for them, and in no respect on account of their own merits or deserts: and it is solely through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, that we do, or ever can, obtain this mercy at God's hands.

Now, then, the question is, whether this be the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, or not.

Let us then address ourselves to this important subject, and make our appeal to you, as men of wisdom and judgment, to determine, whether or not our statements be right, and whether they be of such fundamental importance as we profess them to be.

But here it may be thought that we shall merely bring forward some passages of St. Paul's writings, which may be differently interpreted; and that, after all, the question will remain where we found it. But this shall not be our mode of proceeding. If the point be as we maintain, we may expect that it will run, like the warp, throughout the whole Scriptures, and not depend upon any particular expressions that may here and there be interwoven with it by one favourite author. We will take then, but with all possible brevity, a comprehensive view of the subject; and will inquire—

I. What is the true way of our salvation? and

II. What evidence we have that this is the only true way ?

Under the former of these heads we will distinctly examine, What was the way of salvation dictated by the moral law ? what by the ceremonial law ? what was proclaimed by the prophets ? what by our Lord Jesus Christ himself ? and what was maintained by his Apostles ? what was the way in which the most eminent saints of old were justified ? and what is the way marked out in the authentic records of our Church ? Of course, on these several points we must be very concise ; but we hope, nevertheless, to be clear and satisfactory.

What, then, was the way of salvation to which *the moral law* directed us ? Our adversary will here exultingly reply, “ by works.” True, as given unto man *in innocence*, it did say, “ Do this, and live.” But what does it say to *fallen* man ? Does it encourage him to hope for salvation by his obedience to it ? Hear what it says to all who are under it : “ Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” Does this afford us any encouragement to seek salvation by our works ? Our obedience must have been absolutely perfect from the first moment to the latest hour of our lives, or else the law, instead of promising any reward, denounces a curse against us ; and on this account it is said by infallible authority, that “ as many as are under the law, are under the curse.” Is it asked, Why then was it promulgated in so solemn a manner on Mount Sinai ? I answer, To shew us how awfully sin abounded in the world, and how much we stood in need of a Saviour ; and thus to “ shut us up to the faith that should afterwards be revealed,” and to constrain us to seek for salvation by faith alone. This is what we are expressly told by an inspired Apostle : “ Wherefore then serveth the law ? It was added, because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made. Is the law then against the promises of God ? God forbid ! for if there had been a law given which could have

given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law: but the Scripture hath concluded (hath shut up) all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to all that believe. Wherefore *the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith^a.*"

Next, let us hear the *ceremonial law*. In all the burnt-offerings, and the peace-offerings, and the sin-offerings, a fundamental part of the institution was, that the person who brought the offering should put his hand on the head of the victim, in token that he transferred all his sins to it; and then, when the sacrifice was slain, and its blood sprinkled according to the commandment, the offender was liberated from the sin that he had committed^b. But we will direct your attention to the offerings which were annually made for the sins of all Israel, on the great day of atonement. Two goats were taken: one was to be slain for a sin-offering for the whole people of Israel, and its blood was to be carried within the vail, and sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat. Then the live goat was brought forth, and the high-priest was to lay both his hands upon his head, and to confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat: and then the goat was to be led away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness, bearing upon him all their iniquities, unto a land not inhabited^c. Can any thing be conceived more plain and simple than this? Who does not see that the sins of the people were expiated by the blood of the one, and carried away in consequence of their having been transferred to the other? Who does not here see written, as with a sun-beam, the truth it typified; namely, that "Christ died for our offences, and was raised again for our justification;" and that we are saved entirely by the exercise of faith in him, or, in other words, by transferring our guilt to him, and looking for mercy

^a Gal. iii. 19—24. ^b Lev. i. ii. iii. ^c Lev. xvi. 15, 21, 22.

through his all-atoning sacrifice? Verily, if we make no better use of the explanations given us in the New Testament than to refine, and cavil, and obscure the truth, we had better go at once, and learn of a poor ignorant Jew: for there was no Jew so ignorant, but, when he saw that rite performed, could tell you in what way his iniquities were to be forgiven. And, if only we will bear in mind that ordinance, we may defy all the sophists upon earth: for it speaks the truth so plainly, that "he who runs may read it."

Turn we to the *prophets*: They bear one uniform testimony to the truth we are proclaiming. Through fear of detaining you too long, we will wave the mention of any particular passages; because, if we believe the declaration of God himself, their testimony is all summed up in one infallible declaration: "To him give *all the prophets* witness, that, through his name, whosoever *believeth in him* shall receive remission of sins^d."

Our blessed Lord invariably declared, that his blood should be shed for the remission of sins, and that in no other way than by faith in him could any child of man be saved. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me^e." "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of man be lifted up; that *whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life." "He that *believeth on him*, is not condemned; but he that *believeth not*, is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God^f." If it be said, that, in answer to one who inquired, "What shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?" he replied, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments;" we answer, he did so: and we highly disapprove of that mode which some take of evading the force of his words, by saying that he

^d Acts x. 43.^e John xiv. 6.^f John iii. 14—16, 18.

spoke them ironically. We are persuaded that our Lord would not have indulged in irony or sarcasm on such an occasion, and least of all towards one whom "he loved^g." The meaning of his answer was; "Come, and follow me in all that I command you, and you shall gradually be guided into all truth." And the command which he immediately gave the Youth, to go and sell all that he had, and to look for treasure in heaven, put his sincerity to the trial, and shewed him, that, notwithstanding the anxiety he professed to learn the way to life, he was more attached to his wealth than to his Saviour and his God. When our blessed Lord more explicitly declared the way of salvation, he spoke of himself as having come into the world for the express purpose of giving up his life "a ransom for many^h," and of giving men his own flesh to eat, and his blood to drink, for the life of their soulsⁱ.

Of the views given by *the Apostles*, our opponents themselves have but little doubt; and hence, for the most part, the Epistles are no very favourite part of Scripture with them: and some will go so far as to say, that they think it would have been better if the Epistles of St. Paul had never been written.

But let us hear St. Peter on the day of Pentecost. When three thousand persons at once were crying out with great agony of mind, "Men, and brethren, what shall we do?" his answer to them is, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins^k;" that is, 'Change your minds with respect to Him whom you have crucified as a malefactor; and, with deep contrition of heart for your rejection of him, look to him now as the only Saviour of your souls, and become his open followers in token of your faith in him.' The same Apostle, addressing the whole Jewish Sanhedrim, speaks thus of that Jesus whom they had crucified: "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner:

^g Compare Matt. xix. 16, 17. with Mark x. 18, 21.

^h Mark x. 45.

ⁱ John vi. 52—58.

^k Acts ii. 38.

neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved^l." Of St. Paul it is scarcely needful to speak. Only let a man, desirous of knowing the truth of God, read with an unprejudiced mind the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, and he could no more doubt what were St. Paul's sentiments, than he could doubt whether the sun shines at noon-day. That a learned and ingenious man may involve the plainest subjects in obscurity, and may maintain even the most palpable absurdities with somewhat like a plausible course of argument, is well known to this audience, who are habituated to investigate theories of every kind. But the Scriptures are written for the poor: and it is a fact, that the poor do understand them; whilst the vain disputers of this world are bewildered in their own mazes, and by the just judgment of God are "taken in their own craftiness^m." But, that we may not seem as if we took St. Paul's testimony for granted, we will bring to your remembrance that answer which he gave to the jailor, when inquiring, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He replied to the same effect as Peter had done on the day of Pentecost, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be savedⁿ."

We will mention also that striking reproof which he gave to Peter, for countenancing, by his dissimulation, the idea, that something besides faith in Christ was necessary to salvation: "We (we Jews, we Apostles,) knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ; even we have believed in Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified^o."

Here perhaps it will be urged, that the testimony of St. James is altogether on the opposite side; for that he says, "We are justified by works, and not by faith only^p." But if only we attend to the scope of

^l Acts iv. 10—12. ^m 1 Cor. i. 18—29. and iii. 18, 19.

ⁿ Acts xvi. 30, 31. ^o Gal. ii. 16. ^p Jam. ii. 24.

St. James's argument, we shall see that he does not at all contradict St. Paul. St. James is writing to some who were disposed to abuse St. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith only; who "*said* that they had faith^a," but had no works to support their claim. These he tells that their faith was dead, and no better than the faith of devils. He declares to them, that, as it would be to no purpose to profess compassion for a fellow-creature, when at the same time we made no effort to relieve his distress; so it is in vain to profess faith in Christ, if we shew not forth our faith by our works. Abraham and Rahab were believers; but they evinced by their conduct, of what kind their faith was; namely, that it was not a dead and barren, but a lively and operative, faith. And we in like manner must give, by our works, an evidence that our faith is genuine: for in any pretensions which we make to a saving faith, it is by our works that we must be justified (or proved upright), and not by faith only. St. Paul, on the other hand, is arguing expressly on the subject of a sinner's justification before God; and he maintains that no man is, or can be, justified in any other way than by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, let us see what *the most eminent saints of old* found effectual for their salvation. And here the path is prepared for us by St. Paul, so that we need little more than quote his words. In the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where he is arguing this very point, he asks, "What shall we then say, that Abraham, our father as pertaining to the flesh, hath found (*i. e.* hath found effectual for his justification)? for if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not before God (*i. e.* he has nothing whereof to glory before God). For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt: but to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that *justifieth the ungodly*, his

^a Jam. ii. 14—26.

faith is counted for righteousness: even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God *imputeth righteousness without works*; saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered: blessed is the man, to whom the Lord will not impute sin^r." We regret that we have not time to make any observations upon this passage: but whoever will read it attentively will find, that every word we have uttered is confirmed by it, beyond the power of sophistry to set aside.

To Abraham and David under the Old Testament, we will add St. Paul under the New; and methinks, if *he* had no righteousness of his own wherein to trust, *we* cannot pretend to any. Hear, then, what he says respecting the grounds of his hope: "We desire to win Christ, and to be found in him, *not having our own righteousness*, which is of the law, but *the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ*, even the righteousness which is of God by faith^s." Are we so much holier than he, that when he renounced all trust in his righteousness, we should make ours, either in whole or in part, the ground of our dependence? After all this, it is scarcely needful to refer to the avowed sentiments of *our reformers*: indeed we have no time to do it at any length: we will content ourselves therefore with reciting to you the eleventh article of our Church: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith; and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are *justified by faith only*, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification."

II. We now come, in the second place, to shew, that *this alone is the appointed way of acceptance with God*—

This part of our subject being of such vast importance, we must beg leave to enter into it somewhat

^r Rom. iv. 1—8.

^s Phil. iii. 8, 9.

minutely ; and to shew, first, that *this alone accords with the character given of the true Gospel*; and, next, that *this alone is suited to our condition as fallen sinners*.

As to the marks which characterize the Gospel, one of peculiar importance is, that *it magnifies the grace of God*. We are told by St. Paul, that God gave his Gospel to us, “that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.” And if we consider salvation as entirely by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the grace of God is indeed magnified beyond all the powers of language to express. The gift of God’s only dear Son to die for us, the laying of all our iniquities on him, the accepting of his vicarious sacrifice in our behalf, the offering of a full salvation to all the sinners of mankind, on account of what he has done and suffered for us ; a bestowing of this salvation freely, without money and without price, even upon the very chief of sinners ;—all this is such a stupendous work of grace, that it fills even heaven itself with wonder. But let man be required to purchase this salvation, either in whole or in part, by any works of his own ; and who does not see how the grace of God is lowered ? We will grant, for argument’s sake, that the giving of salvation on *any* terms, would have been a wonderful display of grace ; but, as compared with that which is revealed, it would have been no grace. As the Apostle says of the Mosaic dispensation, that “notwithstanding it was made glorious, it had no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth ;” so we may say of such a mutilated Gospel as we are speaking of ; it might be glorious, inasmuch as it would be an exercise of mercy ; but it would have had no glory, by reason of the infinitely brighter display of Divine grace in the Gospel, as it is revealed to us. Indeed, St. Paul tells us, that if *any* thing were required on our part towards purchasing of salvation, salvation could be no longer of grace ; because the two are contrary to, and absolutely inconsistent with, each other.

“If,” says he, “salvation be by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace: but if it be of works, then it is no more of grace; otherwise work is no more work^t.” Hence he elsewhere says, “It is of faith, that it may be by grace:” and again, “Christ is become of no effect unto you; whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace^u.” This, then, is one evidence, that salvation must be by faith alone, without works.

Another most important mark of the true Gospel is, that it *cuts off all occasion for boasting*. God has said, that he has made Christ the great depository of all spiritual blessings, in order “that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that all might glory in the Lord alone^x.” And it is evident, that by the Gospel, as Paul preached it, all boasting is excluded.

But suppose that our works in any measure whatever formed a ground of justification before God; should we have no occasion for boasting then? Assuredly we should: for in proportion as we had procured it by our works, we might claim it as a debt, and say, “I have procured this unto myself.” It matters not in what degree this exists: if it exist in any degree whatever, boasting is not excluded. Even in heaven itself we might say, “I owe it not entirely to the free grace of God that I am here, but partly to my own superior merit.” This is declared by St. Paul in very express terms: “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith^y:” that is, if it were in any degree, even the smallest that can be imagined, by works, there would be room for boasting; but seeing it is solely by faith in the Lord Jesus, all boasting is, and must for ever be, excluded. Hence, in giving an account of the Gospel salvation, he says, “By grace ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast^z.” Let these words be remembered, “*Not of works, lest any man should*

^t Rom. xi. 6.^u Gal. v. 4.^x 1 Cor. i. 29, 31.^y Rom. iii. 27.^z Eph. ii. 8, 9.

boast ;" and there will be an end of all further argument on this subject.

One more mark of the Gospel salvation is, that it *secures the performance of good works*^a. The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, teaches us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world^b. Many are apt to imagine, that the doctrine of salvation by faith alone destroys all incentive to holiness, and tends to encourage all manner of licentiousness : this was the very objection which was urged against the Gospel in the Apostle's days, and which he set himself strongly to refute. Anticipating the objection, he says, " Shall we then continue in sin, that grace may abound ? God forbid ! How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein ?" And again ; " Do we then make void the law through faith ? God forbid ! yea, we establish the law^c." The fact is, that there is nothing so operative as a lively faith. What was the spring of all those glorious actions that were performed by the long catalogue of worthies mentioned in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews ? From beginning to the end, we are told that faith was the principle by which they were actuated, and the root from which all their obedience sprang. Of the New Testament saints, none exceeded, or even equalled, Paul : and what was it that actuated him ? He tells us : " The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead ; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again." This is the effect which faith will, according to its measure, produce in all. It

^a Had there been a fifth Sunday in the month, this would have been made a distinct subject : but the whole being to be comprised in four Sermons, this part could not possibly be extended, or be rendered so prominent, as the Author wished. But what is here spoken is the most decided sentiment of his heart.

This want has since been supplied in a Sermon, on Ps. cxix. 128. entitled, " The true Test of Religion in the Soul."

^b Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^c Rom. vi. 1, 2. and iii. 31.

will “work by love,” and “overcome the world,” and “purify the heart.” What if the works it produces be not to be relied on for our justification before God? Is it nothing that they will be adduced in the day of judgment as the evidences of our love to Christ, and as the measure of our everlasting reward? Is it nothing that God is glorified by them, and that the dispositions from whence they spring constitute our meetness for the heavenly inheritance? Surely these are motives enough for the performance of them, without making them the meritorious cause of our salvation; and, if we look to fact and experience, who are the persons at this day that are accounted righteous overmuch, and are represented as making the way to heaven so strait that none but themselves can walk in it? Is it among the declaimers about good works, that we must look for these persons? No; but among those who renounce all dependence on their own works, and seek for salvation by Christ alone: a sure proof, that they who look for redemption solely through the blood of Christ, are by that very principle made “a peculiar people zealous of good works.”

These, then, are clear evidences that the way of salvation is precisely such as we have declared it to be: for there is no other doctrine under heaven that has these marks connected with it, or these effects proceeding from it.

The second thing we mentioned as establishing our doctrine, was, that there is no other way of salvation *suited to our condition as fallen sinners.*

Take the way of salvation by *our own works*: who will venture to build his hopes on such a foundation as that? Who is not sensible that in many things he has offended God? For those offences he must answer at the judgment-seat of Christ. If throughout a great part of our life we had done all that was commanded us, we should still be unprofitable servants: our obedience to some commandments would make no atonement for our violation of others: for the sins that we had committed, we must die.

But it may be said, that of those offences *we repent*. Be it so : still our tears can never wash out the guilt we have already contracted. Even in human governments, a criminal that is under sentence of death may be truly sorry that he has transgressed the laws, and may determine never to repeat his crimes any more ; but these sorrows and resolutions will not avail to rescue him from death, or to repeal the sentence that is gone forth against him : much less can any repentance of ours remove the curses of God's holy law, or avert the judgments which our sins have merited.

But it may be said, we rely not on our works alone, nor on our repentance alone, but on *these things and Christ's merits united*. Go, then, and search the records of your life, and see what works you will bring forth in order to eke out the insufficient merits of your Saviour ; bring forth one single work ; one only out of your whole life ; one that has no defect, and that does not in any respect need the mercy of God to pardon its imperfection : then carry it to God, and say, ' Here, Lord, is a work in which thou thyself canst not find a flaw ; it is as perfect as any that my Lord and Saviour himself ever performed, and is therefore worthy to be united to his infinitely meritorious obedience, as a joint ground of all my hopes : I am content to stand or fall by this one work : I am aware, that if it is imperfect, it stands in need of mercy for its own imperfection, and consequently can never purchase pardon for all my other offences ; but I ask no mercy for that, yea, rather, I claim on account of it all the glory of heaven^d. ' You who will dispute against salvation by faith only, and who wish to have something of your own to found your hopes upon, do this : bring forth some work, some *one* work at least, that shall stand the test of the divine law, and defy the scrutiny of the heart-searching God.

^d Let not the reader suppose that any one is exhorted to go thus to Almighty God : the whole passage is intended to shew the horrible impiety of even entertaining such a thought. The Scriptures frequently put such language into *the lips* of sinners, in order to shew what is the real language of *their hearts*. See Rom. iii. 5, 7. and ix. 19.

But if you cannot find *one* such work, then see how unsuitable to your state is the doctrine for which you contend.

Perhaps it will be said, that God does not require of us imperfect creatures any thing that is *perfect*, but only that we be *sincere*. But who will venture to make his own sincerity the ground of his salvation? If this be the law by which we are to be tried, who shall stand? Who shall say, that from the earliest period of his life he has sincerely striven in *every* thing to please God, and to approve himself to God? Alas! those who stand upon their own sincerity are little aware of the deceitfulness and wickedness of their own hearts; and if they would but look back throughout their whole lives, they would find, that their sincerity, like that of Saul of Tarsus, has only stimulated them to a greater measure of inveteracy against the Gospel of Christ.

We will mention only one more refuge to which these persons will be disposed to flee, and that is, their *having done as well as they could*: 'I have done as well as I could, and therefore I doubt not but that God will have mercy upon me.' But in this we shall all fail, as much as in all the fallacious hopes that have preceded it. For, who has done as well as he could throughout his own life? Who will dare to appeal to God even respecting the best day in his life, that there was no one thing omitted which he might have done for him, nor any one thing done in a less perfect manner than it might have been done?

It is clear, that in all the ways of salvation which men devise for themselves, whether by good works, or repentance, or faith and works united, or sincerity, or doing as well as we can, there is not a spot of ground whereon to place our foot: we must go to the ark of God, and there only can we find rest for our weary souls.

Permit me, then, to address you as dying persons, and to ask, What you will think of these things when standing on the brink and precipice of eternity? Now you can speculate, and dispute, and speak with

confidence about the justness of your views : now you can discuss these matters as if it were of little moment what your sentiments are, or what is the ground of your affiance. But if you hold fast any of the foregoing delusions, you will not find them so satisfactory in a dying hour as you now imagine. Doubts like these will arise in your mind ; ‘ What if my works should be found at last, either in number or quality, insufficient ? What if my fancied goodness, which I am blending with my Redeemer’s righteousness, should prove a refuge of lies ? ’ Amongst the numberless evils to which this fatal error will expose you, is, that in that hour, when you will most need divine and heavenly consolation, your soul will be trembling with uncertainty as to the ground of your hopes, of those hopes which will in a little time be blasted or realized for ever. For, who shall tell you whether you have attained that precise measure of righteousness which God will accept ? And what a fearful thing will it be to be going into the presence of your Judge, uncertain what shall be his sentence upon you, and whether heaven or hell shall be your everlasting portion ! Would you but place yourselves, where you must all very shortly be, on a dying bed, we should not find it so difficult to convince you, that it is better to trust in the righteousness of Christ, which is commensurate with all the demands of law and justice, and adequate to the wants of the whole world, than to be trusting in any respect to any poor defective righteousness of your own. Methinks this argument alone were sufficient to convince any considerate man : supposing that your own righteousness were sufficient, your Lord would not condemn you for thinking too humbly of it, and for relying solely on his all-atoning sacrifice : but supposing it insufficient, will he not condemn you for your pride and arrogance in trusting to it, and for your ingratitude in rejecting his salvation ? Here all the declarations of his word are as pointed and clear as words can make them : “ He that believeth on the Son hath life : and he that believeth

not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him^e.” “ He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned^f.” Both of these declarations were uttered by our blessed Lord himself when on earth ; and he will not forget them, when he shall come again to judge the world.

May I not, then, make my appeal to you ? “ I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say.” Is it wise to turn your back upon righteousness, which, as a rock, is able to sustain a ruined world ; and to be trusting in one that is no better than a foundation of sand ? Know ye that your God is a jealous God : he will not give his glory to another : if ye will seek acceptance with him, through his only-begotten Son, “ no one of you shall ever be cast out :” your sins shall be washed away in his blood ; and your souls be clothed with the unspotted robe of his righteousness. Being justified by faith in him, you shall have peace with God : you shall “ be kept also from falling,” whilst in this ensnaring world ; and in due time you shall be “ presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for every one of you is, that you may be saved : but know assuredly, that there is no salvation for you but by faith in Christ : for “ other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ^g.” To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be glory in the Church throughout all ages, world without end : Amen^h.

^e John iii. 36.

^f Mark xvi. 16.

^g 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^h The Discourse on Ps. cxix. 128. may be referred to as completing this series.

MDCCCLXXVII.

TRUE WISDOM AND CHARITY.

1 Cor. x. 32, 33, & xi. 1. *Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God : even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.*

CHRISTIAN morals, in their sublimer parts, are far from being fully understood, or duly appreciated, even by those who are most zealous in the profession of Christian principles. The duties of Christian forbearance, and Christian forgiveness, and Christian liberality, are but very imperfectly discerned, and, consequently, but very imperfectly practised, in the religious world. Nor are the limits of true Christian charity by any means clearly ascertained. On this subject, in particular, I must say, that I think there is scarcely a Christian upon earth that would have made the distinctions contained in this chapter; and not many that would approve of them, now they are made, if they were not forced to yield to apostolic authority. It is an easy thing to lay down broad principles; as, that “We must not do evil that good may come:” and it is easy to decry “expediency,” as the refuge of time-serving and dishonest men. But it is not easy to see the different modifications of a good principle, as affected by different circumstances; or the different situations under which expediency alone can guide us. And even the discussion of such a subject as this, however carefully conducted, would be condemned at once by many, as no better than Jesuistical sophistry and refinement. But we must not, therefore, be deterred from treading in the Apostle’s steps, and marking what we believe to be the true boundaries of Christian liberty and Christian duty.

I shall take occasion, from the passage before us, to shew,

I. Our duty in reference to things which are indifferent—

There are many things on which different parties lay a great stress; which yet, in the sight of God, are altogether indifferent—

[In the apostolic age, the observance of the Jewish ritual was regarded by some as of primary and indispensable importance. The keeping of certain days, and the abstaining from certain meats, and the practice of circumcision, were by many insisted on as of continued obligation; notwithstanding they

were never intended but as types and shadows, which were to vanish when the substance should appear. There were not in those rites any essential qualities, either of good or evil. They derived all their force from their having been divinely appointed; and, of course, they lost all their force when that appointment was withdrawn. If any chose to observe them, they were at liberty to do so, without any offence to God: and if any were disinclined to observe them, they were equally at liberty to follow the dictates of their own judgment. If any man thought them still obligatory, he of course was bound by them: but all who saw that they were no longer required, were free to neglect and discard them.

The same might be said of many things at this day, respecting which different parties form different opinions, according to the degree of their information, or to the particular prejudices which they have imbibed. I refer to certain rites and ceremonies in religion, on which some place an undue stress; whilst others, with equal vehemence, decry them. I must say the same, also, in reference to some habits of the world, respecting which men may speak in too unqualified terms; whether they justify them, or whether they condemn.]

But our great duty, in reference to all such things, is, to guard against giving needless offence to any party—

[In reference to Jewish or Gentile observances, the Apostle says, "Give no offence either to the Jews, or to the Gentiles, or to the Church of God." The things about which the parties differed were really non-essential: and there was danger of giving offence to either side by a contemptuous disregard of their prejudices. It was not right to wound the feelings of a Jew, by doing in his presence what was contrary to the law, which he regarded as still in force: nor was it right, by a free and indiscriminate use of meats offered to idols, to hurt the feelings of a Gentile brother; who, having been accustomed to feast on these meats as a religious act, would be ready to think that the person eating them did not indeed abhor idolatry in the way that he professed. At the same time, offence might easily be given to the Church of God, by producing disunion and division amongst her members, whom we should rather have laboured to "edify in faith and love."

The same may be said in reference to all matters of indifference, in every age and in every place. There should be a tender regard to the feelings and infirmities of others; and a determination never to please ourselves at the expense of others. Self-denial, rather, should be the disposition of our minds, and the habit of our lives: and rather than wound the

consciences of others, and lead them by our example to do what their own consciences condemned, we should abstain from the most innocent indulgence, as long as the world shall stand^a. The rule given in relation to all such matters is, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves^b."]

In my text, the Apostle marks,

II. The object which we should keep in view, for the regulation of our conduct—

The salvation of our fellow-men should be an object of the deepest interest to our minds—

[Doubtless the salvation of a man's own soul should be his first concern. But no man should be indifferent to the eternal welfare of others; much less should he think himself at liberty to do any thing which may put a stumbling-block in their way. "We are all, in fact, one body in Christ;" and are bound, every one of us, to consult the welfare of the whole. No member is authorized to act independently, and for itself alone. None but a wicked Cain would ask, "Am I my brother's keeper?" For we are his keeper, as he also is ours: and we are neither at liberty to injure each other, nor to neglect any opportunity of advancing each other's welfare. The duty of mutual love and mutual aid is unalterable and universal.]

With a reference to that, therefore, should we act to the utmost extent of our power—

[We may either benefit our fellow-creatures, or injure them, according as we demean ourselves in reference to things which are in themselves indifferent. We may disgust some, by our unhallowed boldness; or grieve others, by passing an uncharitable judgment upon them; or ensnare others, by inducing them to follow our example, contrary to the convictions of their own conscience. We may, by our uncharitable disregard of the feelings and sentiments of others, produce the most fatal effects that can be imagined; not only offending many, but actually "destroying our weak brethren, for whom Christ died." What a fearful thought! Can any man, who calls himself a Christian, feel himself at liberty to act without any reference to such a result as that? Can any pleasure, or any "profit" arising to himself, compensate for such a calamity as that? Methinks, on any question arising in our minds, we should instantly ask ourselves, not, What will please or profit *myself*? but, What will please or profit others? What

^a 1 Cor. viii. 13.

^b Rom. xv. 1.

^c 1 Cor. viii. 9—11.

will have a tendency to promote the *salvation* of others? If any self-denial or forbearance on my part can advance, in the remotest degree, the salvation of a weak brother, I will die rather than gratify myself at his expense.]

That this is no extravagant requirement, will appear if we consult,

III. The examples which Christ and his Apostles have set us in reference to this very thing—

St. Paul calls us to “be followers of him, even as he was of Christ.”

Consider how our blessed Saviour acted under circumstances of this kind—

[He was called upon to pay a tribute levied for the support and service of the temple. From this, as being the Son of God, he might have pleaded an exemption: because it is an acknowledged fact, that kings receive tribute from strangers only, and not from their own children. But he knew that the Jews would not be able to see the truth and justice of his plea, and that his acting upon it would give serious offence: he therefore waved his right; and chose rather to work a miracle for the satisfying of their demands, than give offence to them by an assertion of his rights. Nor did he only wave his right in this particular, but gave occasion to all present to deny that he possessed any such right, or stood in any such relation to Jehovah as would have authorized him to assert it. Yet he considered not himself, but others only; and chose to submit to any thing, however humiliating, rather than, by maintaining his right, to put a stumbling-block in their way^d. Thus, by his example, he taught all his followers, not to please themselves, but “to please every man his neighbour for good to edification^e.”]

Observe, also, how St. Paul acted—

[It was not on any particular occasion that he conformed to this rule, but constantly, and in circumstances of continual occurrence. Hear his own account of his daily practice: “Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might *gain* the Jews: to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might *gain* them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might *gain* them that are without law:

^d Matt. xvii. 24—27.

^e Rom. xv. 2, 3.

to the weak became I as weak, that I might *gain* the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means *save some*†.” Here you see, not only what his constant habit of life was, but the principle by which he was actuated throughout the whole; preferring the “winning” of men to Christ, and the “saving” of their souls, to any personal consideration whatever. In all this he was an example to us; and therefore says, in reference to this very thing, “Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ.”]

In accordance with this was the conduct also of all the Apostles—

[The last time that St. Paul came to Jerusalem, the whole college of Apostles, fearing that the Jews had a wrong impression of his principles, and that, because he had represented a conformity to Jewish ceremonies as unnecessary, they would imagine he had decried them as sinful, besought him to unite himself to some persons who were about to perform their vows as Nazarites, and purify himself, according to the Mosaic law, with them. And this he did, in conformity with their advice‡: thus not only illustrating the principle by which he was habitually actuated, but setting, as it were, the seal of all the Apostles to this line of conduct, as sanctioned and approved by them.

After all this evidence, nothing further need be added to confirm the statement we have made respecting the Christian's duty, or to enforce the advice which, in conformity with our text, we have presumed to give.]

On the ground therefore which has been established,
I beg you to BEAR IN MIND,

1. What is the principle by which you are to be actuated, in all your intercourse with mankind—

[Love to their souls must animate you at all times: and by that must you be determined, in every thing where the path of duty is not clearly determined for you. By that must you be regulated, whether in acceding to their wishes, or in resisting their solicitations. There are certainly occasions whereon a compliance with them will produce a good effect; and there are occasions whereon it will be your duty rather to withstand the importunity even of your dearest friends. But you must be careful to distinguish aright the principle from which you act. You must not give way to *fear*: nor must you comply from a feeling of *personal friendship* or *regard*: and, least of all, must you conform to the world, to *please*

† 1 Cor. ix. 19—22.

‡ Acts xxi. 20—26.

yourselves. You must consider, under all circumstances, how you may best advance the welfare of men's souls; and then act as in the sight of God, so as most to promote that great object. That is what Christ did, when he left the bosom of his Father, and died upon the cross: and in so doing you will fulfil those injunctions which he has given you; "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others^h:" and that also, in a few verses before the text, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealthⁱ."

2. How you may best approve yourselves to the heart-searching God—

[The mode of conduct which we have recommended will, to superficial observers, lay you open to the charge of inconsistency: for, if you will observe rites, or not observe them, according as others may stand affected towards them, you must of necessity appear to many to be destitute of any fixed principle. But God sees the fixed principle which men cannot see; and he will approve that which perhaps your fellow-creatures will condemn. But, for your conduct in circumstances of more than ordinary difficulty, I would suggest three rules; which, though, when separately taken, they may be insufficient for your direction, will, when taken together, effectually preserve you from any material error. Ask yourselves three questions: *What would an ungodly man do in my circumstances?* That I will not do. Next, *What would be agreeable to my own corrupt heart?* That I will not do. Lastly, *What would my Lord or the Apostle Paul do, in my circumstances?* That I *will* do. Now I say again, that though no one of these, separately, will suffice, all of them together will prove an easy and a safe directory. It will be impossible for you *greatly* to err, if these questions be sincerely asked, and faithfully answered by you. If, in prosecuting this line of conduct, you be misunderstood and blamed, then say, with the Apostle, "It is a small matter to me to be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self; but he that judgeth me is the Lord^k." Thus will you ensure the approbation of your God, and enjoy the testimony of your own conscience that you have pleased him.]

^h Phil. ii. 4.ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 24.^k 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

MDCCCCLXXVIII.

THE DESIGN AND IMPORTANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 Cor. xi. 24, 26. *This do in remembrance of me for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

THE Corinthians had shamefully profaned the Lord's supper. St. Paul reproves them, and rectifies their views of that ordinance.

I. The design of the Lord's supper—

Our ungrateful hearts are prone to forget the richest mercies. To keep up "the remembrance" of his death, Christ instituted his last supper. When we celebrate that ordinance, we "shew forth" his death—

[The passover was a memorial of the deliverance vouchsafed to the Jews from the sword of the destroying angel. At every returning celebration of it the reason of that ordinance was declared^a. Christ in his death has effected a greater deliverance for us. In partaking of the bread and wine we "shew forth" his death: we shew forth *the manner of it* as excruciating and bloody^b: we shew forth *the end of it* as a sacrifice for our sins^c: we shew forth *the sufficiency of it* for our full salvation^d.]

We shew forth his death "till he come"—

[Christ will, in due season, come again to judge the world; then his people will no longer need such memorials as these. They will incessantly enjoy the brightest vision of his person, and the richest fruits of his death; but till then the remembrance of his dying love, and the expectation of his future

^a In reference to Exod. xii. 26, 27. a custom obtained among the Jews that a child should ask the meaning of the passover, and that the person who presided should then give an account of its intent and origin, that so the remembrance of God's mercy might be transmitted to their latest posterity: and this was called "the declaration" or "shewing forth." Dr. Gill on the text.

^b The breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the wine seem well calculated to impress this idea.

^c In this light it is represented by St. Paul, 1 Cor. v. 7. and by our Lord himself, Matt. xxvi. 28.

^d We express our affiance in his blood as the Jews did in the blood of the Paschal Lamb, when they sprinkled their door-posts with it, and eat of the flesh that had been roast with fire.

advent, must be thus preserved. Such was Christ's end in instituting, and such should be our end in observing it.]

To enforce the observance of this ordinance, we will proceed to shew,

II. The necessity of attending it—

The duty of commemorating our Lord's death is much neglected; but a neglect of it involves us in the deepest guilt. It implies,

1. Rebellion against the highest authority—

[Christ, the Supreme Governor of heaven and earth, has said, "Do this"; yet the language of too many is, 'I will not.' But they who disregarded *the passover* did not go unpunished^e; much less shall they who slight the invitations to *Christ's supper*^f. Surely it is no less than madness to persist in this rebellion.]

2. Ingratitude towards our greatest Benefactor—

[Christ has even "given his own life a ransom for us;" and shall we disregard his dying command? *On the same night that he was betrayed*, did he institute these memorials of his death. Had he *at that season* such a concern for us, and can we refuse to do so small a thing in remembrance of him? The Jews went thrice every year up to Jerusalem, from the extreme parts of Judæa, to commemorate their deliverance. And shall we turn our backs on the table when it is spread before us? Shall not God visit for such ingratitude as this^g?]

3. Contempt of the richest mercies—

[To communicate, without discerning the Lord's body, can profit us nothing; but to approach the table in humility and faith is a sure mean of obtaining all spiritual blessings. Christ sometimes reveals himself in the breaking of bread, to those who had not so fully discovered him in the ministration

^e If a man had contracted any ceremonial defilement, or were on a journey, he might omit eating the passover at the appointed time; only he must eat it a month afterwards. But if he forbore to eat of it without any such impediment, God said concerning him, "That soul shall be cut off, *that man shall bear his sin*." Numb. ix. 7—11.

^f Luke xiv. 24.

^g Let such conduct be expressed in words; "Thou didst indeed give thy body to be broken, &c. for me; and only requirest me to eat bread, &c. in remembrance of thee; but I account even that too much to do for thee:" Who could dare to utter such language? Or who would endure it if spoken by his servant or his child? Yet such is the language of our actions.

of the word^h. And do they not manifest a contempt of these mercies, who will not use the means of procuring them? How may the Saviour take up that lamentation over themⁱ—!]

4. A renunciation of our baptismal covenant—

[In baptism we covenanted to renounce the world, &c. and to serve God: this covenant we ought to renew and confirm at the Lord's table. But our refusing to confirm it is a tacit renunciation of it. And can we hope that God will fulfil his part while we violate ours? Will he be our God when we refuse to be his people?]

We shall CONCLUDE with answering some excuses—

['*I am not prepared.*' How then can you be prepared to die^k? '*I am afraid of eating and drinking my own damnation.*' Are you not afraid of damnation for neglecting your duty^l? '*I am afraid of sinning afterwards, and thereby increasing my guilt.*' If sins after receiving the Lord's supper were unpardonable, none should receive it till the last moment of their lives^m. '*The time of administering it interferes with other engagements.*' To those who cannot deny themselves in any thing, we say with Paulⁿ—; but where the difficulties are insurmountable, God will accept the will for the deed^o. They however, who are at liberty, should attend "as often" as they can; only they must be careful to communicate with reverence, humility, faith, and gratitude.]

^h Luke xxiv. 30, 31.

ⁱ Matt. xxiii. 37.

^k Is not this acknowledgment the strongest reason for immediate repentance?

^l In neglecting duty you ensure condemnation; in practising it as well as you can (to say the least) you may avert it.

^m If you really desire strength, where would you so soon obtain it? But if you determine to live in sin, your condemnation will be equally sure whether you come or not.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 8. "whose damnation is just." ^o Matt. xii. 7.

MDCCCLXXIX.

ON EATING AND DRINKING OUR OWN DAMNATION.

1 Cor. xi. 27, 29. *Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord . . . For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*

THE more excellent any thing is, the greater is the guilt contracted by the abuse of it. A contempt

of the law is not so bad as a contempt of the Gospel^a. An irreverent attendance on Divine ordinances is exceedingly sinful; but to profane the Lord's supper is worse, inasmuch as that institution is more solemn and brings us nearer to God. Hence when St. Paul reproved the former, he spake mildly^b; but when he reproved the latter, he spake with great severity.

I. What is it to eat the bread, and drink the cup of the Lord unworthily—

To understand this, we should inquire how the Corinthians behaved^c. The abuses of which they were guilty are impracticable now: nevertheless we may imitate them in our spirit and temper. Like them we shall eat and drink unworthily if we do it,

1. Ignorantly—

[The Corinthians did not discriminate between the common and religious use of the consecrated elements. Many at this time also partake without discerning the Lord's body: they, not remembering his death, defeat the end for which the Supper of the Lord was instituted.]

2. Irreverently—

[The customs of our country do not admit of our meeting in the tumultuous way that was practised at Corinth^d; but many are altogether as destitute of reverence and sacred awe. A light, worldly, impenitent heart, is unbecoming that solemnity: such a frame, if habitual, makes us partake unworthily.]

3. Uncharitably—

[The rich did not impart of their provisions to the poor^e. We also may be equally destitute of Christian love: we may be haughty, injurious, unforgiving, &c. Such a frame wholly unfits us for the Lord's table^f.]

4. Sensually—

[The Corinthians made it an occasion for intemperance and excess: though we cannot imitate them in this, we may

^a Heb. x. 28, 29.

^b 1 Cor. xiv. 33, 40.

^c ver. 20—22. Their conduct seems at first sight to be absolutely inconsistent with a profession of Christianity. But, having been accustomed to such behaviour in their feasts during their Gentile state, they were as yet too much addicted to their former habits.

^d 1 Cor. xi. 21.

^e 1 Cor. xi. 22.

^f Matt. v. 23, 24.

be as carnal as they. A want of spirituality and affiance in Christ makes our service carnal; nor can such a service be acceptable to Him who will be worshipped in spirit and in truth.]

To attend at the Lord's table in such a manner is no slight or venial offence.

II. The consequence of so doing—

The consequences mentioned in the text respect,

1. The guilt we contract—

[They were "guilty of the body and blood of our Lord" who crucified him, as they are also who apostatize from his truth^g. They too are involved in the same guilt who partake unworthily of the Lord's supper: they manifest a contempt of his sacrifice^h. What a dreadful iniquity is this! How careful should we be to abstain from the commission of it!]

2. The punishment we incur—

[The word "damnation" imports *temporal judgment*ⁱ. Eternal damnation is by no means a necessary consequence of this sin^k: yet if it be unrepented of, no doubt this punishment will follow; and we may expect some spiritual or temporal judgments for it *here*. We should therefore examine ourselves well before we attend the table of the Lord^l.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who urge this as an excuse for neglecting the Lord's supper—

[There are many who under this pretext cover their own unwillingness to yield themselves up to God; but God will not admit their vain excuses. The habitual neglect of their duty ensures the punishment which they desire to avoid. Let all then devote themselves to the Lord in the use of all his instituted ordinances.]

2. Those who are really kept away by a fear of incurring this punishment—

[Many are kept from the table by a sense of their own unworthiness. But to be unworthy, and to partake unworthily,

^g Heb. vi. 6.

^h Heb. x. 29.

ⁱ The Apostle explains his meaning in the following verse; "for, for this cause," &c. and he tells us that it was a chastisement inflicted to keep them from eternal condemnation, ver. 32.

^k Matt. xii. 31.

^l ver. 28.

are very different things^m: yet if we have partaken unworthily in past times, let us humble ourselves for it; and then may we come again with joy: this has been the experience of manyⁿ, and may be ours also.]

^m A rebel against a mild and merciful prince is unworthy of pardon: but if he receive with gratitude the pardon offered him, and return to his allegiance, he receives it worthily. Thus we are *unworthy* of the smallest mercies, and much more of the children's bread: but if we receive this bread with humility, gratitude, and an increasing devotedness of heart to God, we receive it as we ought, that is, *worthily*.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xxx. 15—23.

MDCCCLXXX.

ON THE PREPARATION REQUISITE BEFORE THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 Cor. xi. 28. *Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.*

GOD is a holy and jealous God, and greatly to be feared: in all our approaches to him we should be filled with awe; but a want of reverence prevails among the generality of mankind; even real Christians manifest it sometimes, and that too even in the most sacred ordinances. St. Paul, reproving the Corinthians for their conduct at the Lord's supper^a, lays down an universal rule for communicants: "Let a man," &c.

I. The duty of self-examination in general—

This is an important but much neglected duty: it is strongly recommended in the Scriptures—

[The Apostle expressly enjoins it to all^b. This injunction is remarkably strong and energetic^c — — —]

There is great reason for it: we cannot ascertain the state of our souls without it—

^a 1 Cor. xi. 20—22.

^b 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

^c In the words δοκιμάζετε and ἀδόκιμοι, which latter is too harshly translated "reprobate," there seems an allusion to the trying of metals by a touchstone: the repetition also of the injunction, and the exhortation that follows it, are expressive of the Apostle's earnestness, and consequently of the importance of the duty enjoined.

[It is evident that the generality of men deceive themselves. We also are liable to the same deception through pride and self-love; nor can we form a right conclusion without a strict investigation.]

A mistake respecting our state would be fatal—

[There is no repentance in the grave: as we die, so shall we continue for ever.]

The benefits to be derived from it are exceeding great—

[If our state be found good, we shall rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience: if it be bad, we shall be stirred up to flee from the wrath to come.]

We should therefore live in the habitual practice of this duty^d. But self-examination is more especially needful on certain occasions—

II. The need of it before the Lord's supper in particular—

This is intimated in the text; “Let a man examine himself, and so let him come.” And indeed there is peculiar reason for it at that time.

That ordinance is a season of remarkable solemnity—

[There we see Christ crucified, as it were, before our eyes: there we contemplate the most stupendous mysteries: there we commemorate the greatest of all mercies: there we are admitted to most familiar fellowship with God. And does it become us to engage lightly in such an ordinance?]

It is a season that calls for the exercise of all our powers—

[The understanding should be occupied in devoutest meditations: the affections should be engaged to the uttermost. And can we thus command our faculties without any preparation?]

The neglect of self-examination may rob us of all the benefit of the ordinance—

[Who can estimate the benefits we might receive if we came prepared? But who has not often communicated in vain? And has not our neglect been the true cause of this]

We should therefore be peculiarly attentive to it at such a season.

^d Ps. lxxvii. 5.

To assist in the discharge of this duty we shall shew,

III. The subjects which we should then more especially inquire into—

We should examine ourselves respecting,

1. Our knowledge of the ordinance—

[To come without a proper discernment is dangerous^e.]

We should inquire what we know of the nature and ends of the ordinance. On a distinct view of these our profiting much depends.]

2. The state of our souls before God—

[At the Lord's table we receive "the children's bread." We should inquire therefore whether we be God's children?]

3. The immediate frame of our souls—

[We ought to have all our graces in lively exercise^f.]

APPLICATION—

[Begin this necessary work without delay — — — Yet set not about it in a legal manner or for self-righteous ends: do not trust in your preparation, or expect acceptance on account of it; but look to Christ as the only ground of your hope towards God: neither stay away from the table because you have not spent so much time in preparation as you could wish. Whether you have used more or less diligence you must go as the publican^g. Be assured however that your profiting will for the most part be proportioned to your preparation.]

^e ver. 27.

^f Cant. iv. 16.

^g Luke xviii. 13.

MDCCCCLXXXI.

NO KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST BUT BY THE SPIRIT.

1 Cor. xii. 3. *I give you to understand, that no man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*

WE trust that amongst us there are none so hostile to the name of Christ, as to "call Jesus accursed;" and therefore we omit from our text that part which is inapplicable to the age in which we live. There were among the Jews many, who, whilst they rejected Christ as an impostor, pretended to be inspired by the Holy Ghost, and, either through magic or satanic

influence, wrought “signs and lying wonders” in confirmation of their word. Amongst believers themselves also, there were some, who made a very unbecoming use of the miraculous powers with which they were endowed, priding themselves upon them, and exerting them rather for the furtherance of their own glory, than for the edification of the Church of Christ. To rectify the views of the Corinthians on these subjects, St. Paul informs them, that the unbelieving Jews, whatever they might pretend to, had not the Spirit of God; since “no man, speaking by the Spirit of God, calleth Jesus accursed:” nor, on the other hand, had those, who possessed the miraculous influences of the Spirit, any such ground for self-preference and self-complacency as they imagined; since every true believer enjoyed those influences which were infinitely the most important; for that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.”

This is a truth of infinite importance; and St. Paul was very anxious that it should be duly weighed and considered. We will, therefore,

I. Explain the assertion in our text—

It is obvious that the text is not to be understood as denying our power to make use of that particular expression; because that form of words is as easily used as any other: but it affirms, that we cannot, without the aid of the Holy Spirit, make use of that assertion,

1. With a full conviction of its truth—

[We may easily from education give a notional assent to the whole Gospel; but when we come to reflect on the idea of our God becoming incarnate, and offering himself a sacrifice for the sins of his rebellious creatures, and reconciling them to himself through his own sufferings upon the cross, the mind revolts at the thought; and the whole plan of the Gospel appears a cunningly-devised fable. We see not any need for such an intervention of the Deity. We are ready to ask, Why could not God pardon us without such an atonement? Why could not his mercy be extended to us on our repentance and amendment, without any such devices as those which the Gospel professes to reveal? Yes: when these mysteries are more nearly

contemplated, they are "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:" and "the natural man neither does, nor can, receive them^a."

2. With a just sense of its importance—

[Supposing the mysterious truths of Christianity to be admitted from the force of reasoning alone, the importance of them can never be felt, but from a deep consciousness of our guilt and helplessness before God. We must feel our disease, before we justly appreciate the remedy. But who can ever know the desperate wickedness of his own heart, unless he be taught of God^b? Who can see the fulness that is in Christ, and his suitableness to our necessities^c, till the eyes of his understanding have been enlightened by the Spirit of the living God^d? We must be "brought out of darkness into marvellous light," before "Christ can become so precious to us" as he deserves to be.]

3. With a suitable determination to act upon it—

[When we truly confess Christ as our Lord and Saviour, we shall of necessity feel his love constraining us to live no longer to ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again^e. But who can thus live, unless he be aided and strengthened from on high? Are the world, the flesh, and the devil so easily vanquished, that we can by any power of our own subdue them? No: it is "not by might or by power, but by the Spirit of God" alone that such victories are gained^f. Grace must lay the foundation-stone; and grace must bring forth the head-stone: and to all eternity must the glory be ascribed to the grace of God alone^g.]

Thus comprehensive is the assertion contained in our text. We will now,

II. Commend it to your most attentive consideration—

The Apostle evidently considered this declaration as of peculiar importance: "I give you to understand this," says he; and I wish you ever to bear it in remembrance, as of singular use both for the instruction of your minds, and the regulation of your lives. This one assertion, truly understood, will shew you,

^a 1 Cor. i. 23. and ii. 11, 14.

^b Jer. xvii. 9.

^c Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^d Eph. i. 17, 18.

^e 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^f Zech. iv. 6. and Phil. ii. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^g 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9. 2 Cor. v. 5. Rev. vii. 9, 10.

1. What is the great office of the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption—

[Amongst the many purposes for which our blessed Lord was sent into the world, one was, to “declare the Father to us^h.” But the chief end for which the Holy Spirit is sent, is, to “testify of Christ,” and “to take of the things that are his, and to shew them unto usⁱ.” This then is the end for which we are to desire the gift of the Holy Ghost: we should feel sensible that we cannot know Christ, unless the Spirit reveal him in us^k; or come to him, except the Spirit draw us^l; or be one with him, unless the Spirit form him in our hearts^m. This is a point by no means considered as it ought to be. We have an idea that the Holy Spirit is to “help our infirmities;” but we have no conception of the extent to which we need that help, and especially in relation to the knowledge of Christ. But we entreat you to consider fully the declaration in our text, and to take it as a clew, which, if duly followed, “will guide you into all truth.”]

2. How deeply we are concerned to obtain his gracious influences—

[If “to know Christ be life eternalⁿ,” and those who know him not must die in their sins^o, it is obvious, that we never can obtain salvation but through the all-powerful agency of the Holy Spirit. But we need not take this in a way of deduction; for the voice of inspiration has expressly said, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his^p.” Should it not then be a matter of serious inquiry with every one of us, Whether we have received the Holy Ghost; and whether he has performed in us that great work of discovering to us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^q? Let us not be satisfied with any views which are merely obtained from books, and which may float in the mind without any influence on the heart; but let us, by prayer and supplication, seek the gift of the Holy Spirit, that through him we may be taught what no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived^r.]

3. How thankful we should be for the smallest measure of his influence—

[If we have been taught truly and from our hearts to say that Jesus is the Lord, we then have certainly received the Holy Ghost; since it is by his gracious influence alone that we

^h John i. 18. and xvii. 26.

ⁱ John xv. 26. and xvi. 14.

^k Matt. xi. 27.

^l John vi. 44.

^m Gal. iv. 19.

ⁿ John xvii. 3.

^o John viii. 24.

^p Rom. viii. 9.

^q 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^r 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

are enabled to do so. The assertion in our text establishes this truth beyond a doubt: for "no man," however learned he may be, has any advantage over the poor *in this respect*. "If any man will be wise," he must divest himself of all his fancied pre-eminence, and "become a fool, that he may be wise^s." On the other hand, if any man have attained a just knowledge of Christ, he has that, in comparison of which all other things are as dung and dross^t. Let not any one then be cast down because he possesses a smaller measure of earthly distinctions: for there is an infinitely greater distance between the meanest believer and the most learned philosophers on earth, than can be found between any two persons that have been taught of God. The wisdom of this world is of no account in the sight of God; and at all events it benefits men only for this present life: but he to whom the Holy Spirit has imparted even the smallest measure of the knowledge of Christ, possesses the choicest gift that God himself can bestow, and is made "wise unto everlasting salvation."]

^s 1 Cor. iii. 18.

^t Phil. iii. 8.

MDCCCCLXXXII.

THE OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

1 Cor. xii. 11. *All these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

THE Corinthian Church was richly endowed with gifts: but the persons so endowed were not proportionably enriched with grace. Hence their gifts in too many instances administered only to strife and disorder; creating pride in some, who gratified themselves with an ostentatious display of their preternatural powers; and calling forth envy in others, whose powers were only of an inferior order. To counteract and rectify these disorders, St. Paul directed the people's attention to the origin and use of all these gifts which had been conferred upon them. He shewed that they were all imparted by the Spirit of God according to his own sovereign will and pleasure, without any reference to the merits or attainments of the people themselves; and that they were bestowed on them, not for the aggrandisement of the favoured individuals, but for the benefit of

the whole Church. This is the precise import of the whole chapter, as it is also of the fourteenth chapter, wherein the subject is still further prosecuted: it is confined, I say, to the *gifts* of the Spirit, without referring to the *graces*. Yet we shall take occasion from our text to notice also the *graces* of the Spirit, because they will be treated of with peculiar advantage in this connexion.

We will consider then the work of the Holy Spirit generally; and notice,

I. His miraculous operations—

The powers communicated by him to the Church were extremely various—

[At this time it is not easy to say what was the precise difference between some of the powers specified in the preceding context, though doubtless, when the epistle was written, they were well understood. “The word of wisdom,” probably refers to a large and comprehensive view of the great mysteries of redemption: and “the word of knowledge,” to a more particular insight into the types and prophecies, with an ability to explain them for the edification of others. “The faith,” there mentioned, was such a confidence in God, as emboldened a person to go forward in the midst of all dangers undaunted and undismayed. “The gift of healing,” was a power merely confined to the healing of disorders; whilst “the working of miracles” was operative on a larger scale. The gift of “prophecy,” was a power of foretelling future and contingent events: the power of “discerning spirits,” enabled a person to estimate with certainty and precision the motives by which others were actuated: the gift of “divers tongues,” qualified a person to speak in languages which he had never learned: and “the interpretation of tongues,” was a power of instantly interpreting such discourses to other persons in a language which they understood: so that, whilst some of the audience were addressed in a language familiar to them, the rest might also have the benefit of the discourse, by having it interpreted to them in their vernacular tongue; by which means, a mixed assembly, belonging to different countries, might all be instructed and edified by the same discourse.

If in this brief attempt to assign to each word its proper import we should not have exactly marked the precise meaning of each, it will be of little consequence; our object being, not so much to enter into a critical examination of doubtful points, as to mark that in which all are agreed; namely, that all the miraculous gifts, of whatever kind they were, proceeded from

“that one and the self-same Spirit,” the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity. And here we wish it to be distinctly noticed, how *repeatedly* that adorable Person is mentioned as the author of all the gifts: “To one is given, *by the Spirit*, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, *by the same Spirit*; to another, faith, *by the same Spirit*; to another, the gifts of healing, *by the same Spirit*,” and then, after the mention of many other gifts, “All these worketh *that one and the self-same Spirit*.” This shews what a holy jealousy the Apostle felt for the honour of that Divine Agent; and how anxious he was that the people might not for a single moment forget, to whom, and to whom alone, they were indebted for every gift that they enjoyed.]

By him also all the gifts were bestowed according to his own sovereign will and pleasure—

[Doubtless whatever God does is founded, not in a mere arbitrary will, but in the inscrutable counsels of his own wisdom: still however, as far as we are concerned, the effect is the same as if his will alone were the ground of his actions; because the counsels by which they are regulated are known to himself alone. He has no respect to any thing in *us* as the ground of his preference: he is not influenced either by our merits, or our attainments; but dispenses his gifts to whomsoever he will, and in the measure that he sees fit: bestowing on some the higher gifts; on others, the lower; and on others, none at all. This is beautifully illustrated by a reference to the natural body^a. The body consists of different members, to each of which is assigned some peculiar office, together with appropriate powers for the discharge of it. The eye, the ear, the hands, the feet, have all their own peculiar structure, fitted for the uses for which they were designed by God himself. The different powers were not given to any one of them on account of its own superior goodness, or for its own use alone: but all were given for the use of the whole; “God having set every one of them in the body *as it hath pleased him*”^b. In relation to these, every one sees plainly, that God alone determined what powers to create, and where to place them in the body, and what measure of influence every member should possess: and, in the whole of it, nothing is for a moment contemplated but the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of the Creator. Never does any one entertain a thought that any one member has the least reason to glory over another, since all owe their respective powers *to the same Divine Author*; and all are mutually dependent on each other for such aid as they are severally fitted to impart. A more apt illustration could not

^a ver. 12—27.

^b ver. 18.

have entered into the mind of man. The members of the Corinthian Church composed all one body in Christ: and their respective talents, whether of a higher or inferior order, were committed to them by the Spirit of God, not for their own use or honour, but for the good of the whole: God himself in the whole of the dispensation, having consulted only his own wisdom, and acted only according to his own sovereign will^c.]

In connexion with the miraculous operations of the Spirit, we have proposed to consider also,

II. His spiritual influences—

These also are greatly diversified—

[We have several mentioned by St. Paul: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, joy, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance^d.” In truth, every holy disposition is from him, even “from that self-same Spirit,” “from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.” The illumination of the mind is from him; for it is he whom “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ gives to us, as the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him^e.” The sanctification of the soul is from him: for “God has chosen us through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience^f.” From him also is all spiritual consolation: for it is on this very account that He is called “The Comforter^g.” From the very beginning to the end of our salvation, it is He who “worketh all in all.” Are we born again? it is “of the Spirit^h.” Are we helped in our infirmities? it is “by the same Spiritⁱ.” Are we progressively changed into the Divine image from one degree of glory to another? it is “by the same Spirit^k.” Have we in our souls a sure testimony of our adoption into God’s family? it is “from the same Spirit^l.” Are we sealed unto the day of redemption^m? it is by the same Spirit, who alone “worketh all our works in usⁿ.”]

They are given too according to his own sovereign will and pleasure—

[We are expressly told, that he “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will^o,” and that he “worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure^p.” We see how sovereignly he dispensed his blessings in the days of old, giving to Abraham, faith; to Moses, meekness; to Job, patience;

^c Heb. ii. 4.

^d Gal. v. 22, 23.

^e Eph. i. 17.

^f 2 Thess. ii. 13. and 1 Pet. i. 2.

^g John xiv. 16, 17.

^h John iii. 5.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 26.

^k 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^l Rom. viii. 15, 16. ^m Eph. i. 13, 14.

ⁿ Isai. xxvi. 12.

^o Eph. i. 5, 6, 9, 11.

^p Phil. i. 13.

to Daniel, wisdom; to Paul, zeal and love. Whence was it that these were so eminent for those particular graces by which they were severally distinguished? Whence was it that a few poor fishermen were chosen to be the depositaries of divine knowledge in preference to any of the Scribes and Pharisees, or any of the philosophers of Greece and Rome? Whence in every age has God “revealed to babes and sucklings the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent?” There is but one answer to be given to it all; “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight^a.” “God’s grace is his own^r;” and he imparts it to whomsoever he will, “according to the measure of the gift of Christ^s;” that is, in the time, and manner, and measure that he sees fit. From the whole of his work human merit is absolutely excluded as the procuring cause^t, as human strength is as the efficient cause^u, that no flesh should glory in his presence, but all the glory be given to God alone^x.]

Let us LEARN from hence

1. What we are to think of this great Agent—

[*Volition is inseparable from personality*: and such actions, as are here ascribed to the Holy Spirit, proceed from none other than God. The enabling of men to work all kinds of miracles is beyond the power of any finite and created intelligence to effect. Here then we have a demonstration of the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit. This passage alone establishes this doctrine beyond a doubt. And when we recollect, that all our hope is from HIM; that, as our justification is altogether from the Lord Jesus Christ, so our sanctification is altogether from the Holy Spirit; it is of infinite importance that our minds be rightly instructed in reference to this point: for as, if Christ be not God, we can have no hope from his death, so, if the Holy Spirit be not God, we can have no hope from his agency. Let this truth then be settled in our minds; that He who, in the economy of redemption, has engaged to supply the place of Christ on earth^v, is very God^z, and able to effect for us, and in us, the whole work which he has undertaken.]

2. Whither we are to look for all needful assistance—

[To this Divine Agent must we look, and not in any respect to ourselves. He it was who wrought the whole work in the days of the Apostles, and has continued to work in the

^a Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^r Matt xx. 15.

^s Eph. iv. 7.

^t Tit. iii. 5, 6.

^u 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^x 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^v John xvi. 7.

^z See Acts v. 3, 4.

Church even to the present hour. To him therefore must we look. Let us suppose the present assembly to be in the very state in which that assembly was on the day of Pentecost; our eyes as blind, our hearts as hard, yea, our hands yet reeking with the Saviour's blood: must we despair? No: He, who converted thousands of them in one single day, can work effectually on us also, and accomplish in us all that our necessities require — — — Let us pray then that the Spirit may be poured out upon us as he was upon them: and then may we expect the same moral change on our hearts as was wrought on theirs. Let but "the word come to us in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," and all will be done for us that shall be necessary for our sanctification and our complete salvation.]

3. To whom we must give the glory of all that is good in us—

["He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God:" and he must be acknowledged as the sole author of all good. As in the miraculous powers that were imparted, "he was all in all;" and as in the faculties which our different members possess, "he is all in all;" so must he be in all that is wrought in our souls^a. Whatever then be our faculties of mind or body, they must be improved for him, that he may be glorified in all: and, whatever graces we possess, they must be exercised, not for our own honour, but for his, "that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus."

^a ver. 6.

MDCCCLXXXIII.

CHRISTIANS ONE IN HEART.

1 Cor. xii. 13. *By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

IT has been said, to the reproach of Christianity, that the professors of it have no union amongst themselves, either of sentiment or affection. And this charge, we must confess, is true, so far as Christianity prevails in name only. But, where vital piety exists, there is found an union which obtains in no other society under heaven. Men feel some degree of union with each other, as belonging to the same

country, or town, or society, or calling in life. There are some who boast that they are brothers to all who belong to their fraternity; which relation they discover by certain signs unknown to the world at large. But theirs is a vain pretence: they may extend a little relief to one in distress, because of his standing in that relation to them (which yet is a very narrow and selfish ground of preference), but as for union of heart with each other, they know no more of it than other people; no more of it, than the greatest strangers in the universe. But Christianity brings men not only into one body, but into a oneness of heart and affection; insomuch that, in their collective capacity, they bear the sacred name of "Christ^a," as the members of the human body do of the individual to whom they belong. Of this union my text gives a very clear and accurate description. According to the Apostle, this union is,

I. External and visible—

By baptism we are all brought into one body—

[Whatever may have been the former profession of any man, whether he have been a Jew (a worshipper of the true God) or an idolatrous Gentile; and whatever be his present condition in society, a freeman or a slave; he is no sooner baptized into the faith of Christ, than he becomes a member of Christ's mystical body. Let the disparity between them be ever so great, it makes no difference, as it respects their relation to Christ, or to each other. The least honourable members of the body are as much a part of the body as the eye or hand; and as much dependent on the head, by which they subsist, and to which they minister. And this is precisely the connexion in which the lowest as well as the most exalted Christian stands to Christ, and to the collective body of his Church and people.]

Whatever part in that body we sustain, we should cheerfully perform the duties of it—

[There should be no envying of those who occupy a higher station than we; nor any despising of those who are beneath us. Every member is useful in his place, and necessary to the good of the whole. Indeed, if all were to sustain

^a The name "Christ," in ver. 12. means the *Society* who belong to him.

the same office, there would be no more a body: if all were an eye, or an ear, it must soon cease to exist, for want of such powers as the other parts of the body supply. There is nothing in the body either superfluous or defective. It needs no addition: in truth, it admits of no addition: and if it suffer defalcation, the whole is injured and deformed: for there is no part that can say to any other, "I have no need of thee." In this respect, therefore, all are honourable before God, and all have reason to discharge with pleasure the office assigned to them.]

But it is the other part of our subject that demands our more particular attention. I observe, therefore, that this union is also,

II. Internal and spiritual—

It is surely a remarkable expression which the Apostle uses in my text: "We are all made to drink into one Spirit." What can be the meaning of this? What its force? I apprehend, that if we accurately investigate the influence of the soul upon the human frame, we shall find a strict parallel between that and the influence of the Spirit of God upon the members of Christ's mystical body. Bearing this in mind, I would observe, that the expression in my text imports,

1. A participation of the same vital energies—

[One soul pervades the whole body, and operates alike in every part; calling into activity the eye, the ear, the hand, the foot, and working by all according to their respective capacities. So, whether it be a king upon his throne, or a beggar on a dunghill, if he be truly alive to God, he is quickened by the same Spirit; the whole Church being, in its collective capacity, "the body of Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all^b." Without his aid we can do nothing^c: but by him the weakest is made strong, and is "enabled to do all things" that are required at his hands^d.]

2. An accordance in the same divine principles—

[As one power animates, so one mind directs, the whole man: there is no schism in the body in relation to its actings, every part harmoniously concurring in the object proposed. So, especially, in all important matters, are all the members of Christ's mystical body agreed. In subordinate points there

^b Eph. i. 23.

^c John xv. 5.

^d Phil. iv. 13.

may be some difference amongst different persons, just as there is a distinctive difference of features and complexion amongst persons of different countries; but in all essential matters they are alike. There are some points of doctrine wherein good men are not agreed; in points, for instance, of a Calvinistic or Arminian aspect: and in points of discipline, also, they may differ; some embracing one mode of Church government, and some another. But, in the great leading points of "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," there is a perfect similarity in every true Christian throughout the universe. No one imagines that either of these can be dispensed with, or that, when united, they will be insufficient for the salvation of the soul. There is not one who does not feel himself a lost sinner, deserving of God's wrath and indignation: nor is there one who does not desire "to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness which is of the law, but the righteousness which is of God, through faith in Christ^e." In these respects the whole people of God, of every order and every rank, and every nation under heaven, are altogether "of one heart and of one mind."]

3. A prosecution of the same heavenly pursuits—

[This, too, is found in every part of the corporeal frame: and this also is found in all the members of Christ's body. The worldly pursuits of men may be widely different, according to their situation in society and in the Church of God. But there is not one in all the family of God who does not account the care of the soul the one thing needful; not one who is not labouring, as God shall help him, to flee from the wrath of God, and to lay hold on eternal life. See them wherever they are, or whatever they are doing, they never lose sight of this. In the world or in the Church, by night or by day, they keep steadily in view the prize of their high calling, and run with all diligence in order to obtain it. To "live a life of faith upon the Son of God," and a life of love towards all mankind, is their great object: and from the first moment of their conversion, to the latest hour of their lives, this occupies their minds, and engages their utmost efforts.]

4. A sympathy with the whole body in all its parts—

[No member of the human frame can suffer or rejoice, but as the other members suffer or rejoice with it^f. Nor in Christ's mystical body can any member be indifferent to either the temporal or spiritual welfare of the rest. The conversion

^e Phil. iii. 9.

^f ver. 25, 26.

of men to Christ, even in the remotest quarters of the globe, is a matter of deep interest to the real saint: and the declension of any is with him a source of grief and pain. And if he can administer to the welfare of any, he accounts it a high privilege to exert his influence for that end. A true believer has no interest compared with that of the Redeemer's kingdom: and if he may be an instrument of promoting that, he accounts it a call from God to put forth all his powers, yea, and, if need be, to sacrifice his very life in so good a cause^g.]

From this subject we may SEE,

1. How far we have profited by our baptism—

[Many will lay an undue stress on baptism, as though it of necessity changed and renewed the soul. I grant it does change the *state*, because by it we are made members of Christ's mystical body: and this change is properly ascribed, in our Liturgy, as in our text, to the Spirit of God. But we must experience an inward change besides, and must "drink into one Spirit," having our whole soul renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God. This is absolutely indispensable to the salvation of the soul. The Israelites in the wilderness "were baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and all drink the same spiritual drink: and yet God was angry with them, and overthrew them in the wilderness. And these things happened to them for ensamples^h." The outward form never did, nor ever can, suffice: if we would be the Lord's people indeed, we must "be one spirit with himⁱ," and have really, as the governing principle of our lives, "the mind that was in him^k."]]

2. What benefit we may hope for in communicating at the table of the Lord—

[The expression, "drinking into one Spirit," has a reference to the sacramental cup, of which all communicants partake. And though, where baptism is duly *received*, it is doubtless accompanied with the richest blessings to the soul, yet is the Lord's supper, as being often repeated and received in communion with the whole Church, generally productive of the greater benefit. This seems intimated in the language of our text: for *by the one* we are brought into *one body*; and *by the other*, are "made to drink into *one Spirit*^l." At all events, we can have no doubt what God intends by this ordinance: for, in "eating the flesh of Christ, and drinking his blood," we shall "grow up into him in all things, as our living Head,"

^g 2 Tim. ii. 10. Acts xx. 24.

^h 1 Cor. x. 1—6.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^k Phil. ii. 5.

^l Εἰς ἓν πνεῦμα ἐρραπτύσθημεν· εἰς ἓν Πνεῦμα ἐποτίσθημεν.

and by him be filled with all the fulness of God^m. Come, then, to the table of the Lord, that ye may receive “a supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ!” for “He has the residue of the Spirit^o,” and will send Him to you from the Father^p, in answer to your prayers^q. Come, all of you; and ye shall partake more richly of his vital energies, and be confirmed more strongly in the principles ye have imbibed, and be quickened more abundantly in your pursuit of heaven, and be rendered still more heavenly in all your tempers and affections. Thus shall the whole work of God be perfected in your souls: and in due time you shall resemble the saints above; yea, and be partakers with them in holiness, and felicity, and glory.]

^m John vi. 56, 57. Eph. iv. 15. ⁿ Phil. i. 19. ^o Mal. ii. 15.

^p John xv. 26. and xvi. 7.

^q Luke xi. 13

MDCCCCLXXXIV.

GIFTS AND GRACES COMPARED.

1 Cor. xii. 31. *Corvet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.*

SUCH is the weakness of human nature, that we can scarcely possess any thing that distinguishes us from others, without priding ourselves in it; as though it had sprung from some efforts of our own, or at least had been given us for our superior desert. Even miraculous powers, which could manifestly originate in nothing but God's sovereign will and pleasure, were to the Corinthians a ground of boasting and self-complacency. We, at this time, are perfectly amazed at the indecorous way in which many in the apostolic age abused their powers, and at the manner in which they conducted their religious assemblies. St. Paul, as might well be expected, set himself to reform those abuses, and so to regulate their proceedings, that “all things might be done decently and in order.” With this view, he shewed them, that, whatever the number or quality of “their gifts” might be, whatever “the differences of their administrations,” and whatever “the diversities of their operations,” they all proceeded from “the same God who wrought all in all.” He acknowledged the benefit arising from

the judicious exercise of their miraculous powers; but yet told them, that there was an object far more worthy of their ambition; namely, charity, which was the sum and substance of all Christian perfection. He does not altogether blame their desire of useful gifts: on the contrary, he says, "Covet earnestly the best gifts." But he would not have them satisfy themselves with any measure of such attainments, because without love or charity they were of no value whatever: and therefore he adds, "Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."

Before I come to my subject, I would just observe, that, though some of high name would alter the translation in my text, (from an idea that the Apostle, when reproving the pride and emulation which had prevailed in reference to these gifts, could never encourage the Corinthians to covet them^a,) I feel no doubt but that the translation is correct: for the very same word occurs again at the commencement of the 14th chapter, (the whole of the 13th being only parenthetical, as an explanation of my text,) and it is incapable of being understood in any other way than as it is translated in my text: "Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy:" where, shewing the peculiar usefulness of the gift of prophecy, which was *the expounding of Scripture*, he recommends that they should affect that in preference to any other. Again, in verse 12 of the same chapter, he says, "Forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, *seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church.*" And again, at the close of the same chapter, he says, "Brethren, covet to prophesy; and forbid not to speak with tongues."

I have judged it expedient to dwell somewhat upon this point; because the Apostle's inculcating a desire after the best gifts will have an important bearing on my subject; which is, to shew,

- I. The value and importance of spiritual *gifts*.
- II. The infinitely greater value of spiritual *graces*.

^a Dr. Doddridge.

First, I will endeavour to mark the value and importance of spiritual *gifts*—

The miraculous powers with which many of the primitive Christians were endowed, the Apostle calls “spiritual gifts:” not because in *their nature* they were spiritual, as emanating from the soul, and exercised about things that were altogether heavenly, but because they were spiritual in *their source and tendency*; inasmuch as they were wrought in men by the Holy Spirit, and were imparted to the Church for the purpose of spreading and establishing Christianity in the world. There was a great diversity of them, all proceeding from the same origin, and all conducing to the same end. Hence the Apostle says, “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man, to profit withal. For to one is given, by the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit; to another, faith, by the same Spirit; to another, the gifts of healing, by the same Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discerning of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues; and all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will^b.”

These gifts, at the first establishment of Christianity, were necessary: for, unless God had imparted to the Apostles a spirit of wisdom and of knowledge, they could never have known those “mysteries which were hid in God from the foundation of the world^c.” Nor, if they had not been endued with the gift of tongues, could they have declared to foreigners the blessed truths which they had received. Nor could they have given sufficient evidence of their divine commission to preach those truths, if they had not been enabled to work miracles in confirmation of their word. To have argued with heathens, or even with Jews, would

^b 1 Cor. xii. 4, 7—11.

^c Eph. iii. 9.

have been a slow process, if they had to bear down their adversaries with the mere force of reason ; and to convince them would have been a difficult undertaking : but the performing of miracles superseded, if not entirely, yet in great measure, these laborious efforts, and carried conviction at once to the minds of hundreds and of thousands, who would not have had leisure or ability to enter into long and deep discussions. Thus it was that Christianity was established : and those to whom these divine powers were committed, were highly honoured of God, in being made his instruments for the conversion and salvation of their fellow-men.

But these gifts are now no longer necessary : they have accomplished the work for which they were bestowed. The record of them remains ; and to that we can appeal. That was written whilst multitudes were alive, and able to testify of what their eyes had seen and their ears had heard. To have had those miracles continued would have answered no good end : for they must have been wrought in every age and every place, where the doctrine needed to be confirmed : and then the commonness of them would have destroyed their efficacy upon the mind. Even when they were wrought, they did not carry conviction to the minds of all : and how much less would they have done so at this time, if they had been continued to the present day ! We may well say, that, if men believe not the records of the Old and New Testaments, neither would they be persuaded though they saw one rise from the dead.

These supernatural gifts being withdrawn, we are now left to the use of those means which are placed within our reach. I do not intend to say, that any efforts of ours can convince those who will shut their eyes against the light : for the resurrection of Lazarus, and of our Lord himself, did not effect that : but we have within our reach means, which will, as far as is necessary, subserve the interests of religion in the way that miracles once did. Learning is

now the substitute for those gifts : and by learning must we labour to attain the ends for which those spiritual gifts were formerly bestowed ; namely, *to acquire the knowledge of religion ; to attain a facility of diffusing it ; and to maintain it against all its adversaries.*

By learning we must *attain the knowledge of religion.* Of course, I must not be understood to say, that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity cannot be understood without learning : for then I should condemn to hopeless misery all the unlearned of the earth. No : God has not so constituted his Gospel, that it should be hidden from the poor : for it is a characteristic feature of the Gospel, that it was to be preached to the poor and illiterate, and that it would commend itself to them, whilst it was hid from the wise and prudent. The fundamental truths of our holy religion are few and simple. The man who feels himself an undone sinner, and who looks simply to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, is truly instructed in the Gospel, though he be not able to read one word in it. And the Scriptures are so written, that even the poorest man who can read them, and who has a spiritual discernment given him from above, can comprehend all that is contained in them, so far as it is necessary for the edification and comfort of his own soul : and to keep the Bible out of the hands of the poor, from an idea that they will only receive injury from the perusal of it, is a Popish delusion, an unchristian cruelty, an impious reflection upon God himself. But still I must say, that, to a full and complete understanding of the sacred volume, a very considerable degree of learning is requisite. In truth, that volume itself contains mines of learning, which many years of investigation are scarcely sufficient to explore. Numberless things at this very day are but matters of conjecture, even to the most learned men upon earth, because of the very partial information which is transmitted to us of the customs to which they refer, and the circumstances with which they were connected. And

it may well be doubted, whether the inspired volume will ever be fully understood, unless a Spirit of inspiration be again vouchsafed to unfold it to us.

Nor is learning at all less necessary for the *diffusion* of sacred knowledge. We admire and revere the memory of one favoured servant of God^d, who, possessed as he was of most transcendent talents, and with incredible zeal and industry devoted to the Lord, translated the New Testament into the Persian and Hindoostanee languages. What, then, must be necessary for the translating of the whole Scriptures into all the languages of the world! Let all the learning of our highly-respected University be embodied in one man, and how little would it enable him to effect in three quarters of the globe! In truth, were it not that God's ancient people are scattered over the whole face of the earth, everywhere possessing, in part at least, their own inspired writings, on which ours are founded; and were it not that we had reason to believe that they are ordained of God to be his instruments for the conversion of the world; we should be ready still to regard the Millennial age as far distant as ever; so impossible would it seem, that persons in the present state of the Christian Church, should ever be found for the evangelizing of the world.

And must I not add, that learning is alike necessary for the *maintaining* of Christianity against its adversaries? We cannot contend even with sceptics and infidels, amongst ourselves, without learning: and how much less can we refute all the objections of Jewish Rabbies, and all the errors of the different religionists upon the face of the globe? They will not bow to the authority of our Scriptures: nor can we work miracles to convince them. We must search out all their refuges of lies, and expose all their sophistry, and establish our own religion upon the ruins of theirs. But can this be done without learning? I think, then, we may say, that learning must supply the place of miracles, unless God should

^d The Rev. Henry Martyn, a Member of this University.

be pleased to restore to his Church those powers which for so many centuries have been withdrawn.

Nevertheless, whilst, as becomes me, I exalt amongst you the importance of learning, it is proper that I proceed to point out, in

The second place, The infinitely greater value of spiritual graces. “Covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”

That which is here proposed to them as more excellent than any *gifts*, is the *grace* of Charity; the character and offices of which are fully described in the chapter which follows. Now, in looking into that chapter, we see that the direct tendency of this grace is to mortify all those evil dispositions which had been exercised in the Corinthian Church, and to call forth into action all those holy tempers which had been trodden under foot. The Apostle, therefore, may be considered as saying to the Corinthian Church, ‘You, instead of improving your gifts aright, have made them an occasion of pride, and envy, and jealousy: and I recommend you rather to set your hearts on the attainment of that heavenly principle, which will rectify your disorders, and unite all your souls in love.’

Still, however, we must observe, that the Apostle did not confine himself to this idea; but launched forth into a general view of the excellencies of Charity, in order that he might the more powerfully excite them to the cultivation of it. And, therefore, I will so far follow him, as to shew you the superiority of this grace to all gifts whatever; first, *for our own personal benefit*; next, *for the benefit of the world at large*; and lastly, *for the honour of our God*.

Charity, then, is more excellent than learning; first, *for our own personal benefit*. I would by no means be thought to undervalue learning: it is, beyond all doubt, of immense importance: it expands the mind, and enlarges the heart; and contributes, more than can be well conceived, to raise man above his fellows; insomuch, that all are ready to bow down to him who stands high in repute for the attainment

of it. But, then, it does nothing towards the sanctifying of the heart, or the improvement of the soul in heavenly dispositions: on the contrary, it is too often found to operate precisely as the spiritual gifts did at Corinth, to the engendering of pride and envy, of conceit and jealousy, of hatred and malignity, in the very circle where it most abounds.

But Charity elevates the mind, and purifies it from all these hateful dispositions. It raises the soul to God, and calls forth all our energies in behalf of man. It even transforms us into the very image of God himself, whose name and nature is love. It also greatly tranquillizes the mind, and cuts off all occasion for those painful feelings which agitate the bosoms of the generality, and kindle animosities between man and man. I may go further, and say, as the Apostle does, that, whatever we may possess of such attainments, they will soon vanish away, and leave us as little benefited as if we had never possessed them. But Charity constitutes our meetness for the heavenly inheritance, and is indeed the commencement of heaven in the soul: and it will exist within us, in full activity, when all other things shall have ceased for ever.

Charity, too, is more excellent than learning, *for the benefit of the world at large*. Learning, as I have said, confers extensive good upon mankind: but it is also frequently a vehicle of incalculable evil. To a vast extent has it been employed in the service of infidelity and profaneness; insomuch, that, even in Christian lands, some of the most distinguished historians, poets, and philosophers, have put forth all their energies for the subversion, rather than the establishment, of our holy religion. But Charity is never employed but for the good of mankind. Gladly would it drive from the world every noxious sentiment and feeling, and contribute, as far as possible, to the happiness of all. To benefit the souls of men, is its highest aim: and not so much as one would it suffer to perish, if by any means it could induce him to embrace the proffered salvation. We need only

see the difference between the learned Saul and the pious Paul, and we shall behold this matter in its true light.

I may here add, that learning, how beneficial soever it may be to some, has but few objects, comparatively, with whom it can come in contact. The learned only can appreciate its worth, or make a due improvement of its stores. But love extends to every child of man; and is capable of its fullest exercise, in every place, and under every circumstance that can occur. It is like the sun, which shines alike upon the evil and upon the good; or the rain, which descends alike on the just and on the unjust.

Yet further I must add, that love is more excellent than learning, *as contributing more to the honour of our God*. Though learning is indeed to be traced to God as its true source, yet his agency in it is almost always overlooked; and the honour of it is ascribed to its possessor, who employs it only for his own glory. Even when it is used in support of religion, still, unless under the influence of love, it aims only at the advancement of its possessor in wealth or honour. But love bears upon it the very stamp of heaven; and shews to all, that it proceeds from God. It is "an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men." And in all it does, it seeks to honour God. It would be ashamed to arrogate any thing to itself. It gives to God the glory of its every motion and its every act: and, if only God be honoured, it regards not what portion is assigned to its possessor. I will only add, that learning will sit at ease, and please itself, without any concern for God; whilst love will travel to the ends of the earth, and encounter all imaginable perils, if only man may be benefited, and God be glorified.

Suffer me now, then, to address you in the words of my text; and, in conformity with the Apostle's direction to the Corinthians, to say, in the first place—

"*Covet earnestly the best gifts.*"—It will be remembered, that I have stated this to be the just

translation of the word ; and that, instead of being a *reproof*, saying, “ *Ye do covet*” (and covet improperly) the best gifts, it is a *concession*. “ *Covet earnestly the best gifts ;*” for that is an ambition, which, if duly exercised, I cordially approve. I observed, that this view of the word had an important bearing on my subject : and that bearing I shall now point out. There are religious persons who undervalue learning ; and therefore undervalue it, because they want either the talent or the industry to attain it. But I must bear my decided testimony against all such persons ; and must declare, that their notions are erroneous, their conduct evil, their example pernicious. It is an error to suppose that religion discountenances attainments of any kind : and they who are sent hither (to this university, I mean) for instruction, and neglect to improve their talents according to the plan of study here prescribed, are highly criminal before God and man : nor can they conceive how great a stumbling-block they lay in the way of others, or what injury they do to religion, which is condemned for their sakes. I therefore would say to all, “ *Covet earnestly the best gifts ;*” and not only “ *covet them earnestly,*” but pursue them diligently. And, if I may be permitted to address myself more particularly to those with whom, as a partaker of the same benefits with them in our early education and our present means of prosecuting our studies, I am more immediately connected, I would say, ‘ Inasmuch as your advantages have been greater than perhaps those of any other persons, your proficiency ought to be proportionably great : and, inasmuch as the lines in which you have an opportunity to distinguish yourselves are, through accidental circumstances, more contracted than those of others, you are doubly bound to excel in those lines, where the scope for competition is open to you*.’

Yet I must go on, with the Apostle, to say, good

* Preached before the University, in King's College, on the Founder's day, March 25, 1825.

as this way is, "I have shewn you a more excellent way," and would most earnestly exhort you to walk in it. The way of charity is indeed a more excellent way; and it may well regulate you, even in the prosecution of your studies. You will remember that the Apostle says, "Covet earnestly *the best* gifts." And he tells us plainly what *the best* gifts are: "God has set some in the Church; first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, teachers; *after that*, miracles; *then*, gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues^f." Now, here you will notice, that his judgment was in direct opposition to that of the Corinthians in general. They put the speaking with tongues in the first place, because that was the gift which excited the most admiration, and attracted the most applause: and they accounted the prophets, that is, the expounders of God's blessed word, as low in comparison of them. But the Apostle inverted that order altogether: he put the prophets and teachers next in order to the Apostles; and placed the diversities of tongues the very lowest of all. He estimated these gifts by a very different standard from that which obtained amongst the vain ostentatious Corinthians: he judged of gifts by their usefulness to the souls of men. And this is the judgment which I would recommend to you. Let not your time be so occupied with things curious, or entertaining, or calculated to excite the admiration of men, as to neglect, or keep upon the back-ground, those things which are of practical utility to the Church of God. Learn to estimate these things, not by the world's standard, but by God's: and lay out your time and strength most in those things which will most conduce to the benefit of God's Church and people.

And this you will do, if you cultivate the grace of charity. You will act to God, and not to man. You will seek the edification of your own souls, in every thing that is amiable and praiseworthy; and you will move in the sphere appointed you, so as most to

^f 1 Cor. xii. 28.

advance the welfare of men and the honour of your God. You will not consider it sufficient to attain *gifts*, however great and splendid, when you recollect how empty and worthless they are without charity. The Apostle says, “ Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and *all knowledge* (in which we may include all that is cultivated with so much assiduity and success in this learned university); and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing^g.” After such declarations as these, so strong, so authoritative, so decisive, I may well be excused if I urge upon you a practical attention to them, and entreat you, whilst pursuing, as you ought to do, the best attainments in learning, not to be unmindful of that more excellent way; but to “ add to your knowledge GODLINESS, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness CHARITY^h.”

g 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

h 2 Pet. i. 6, 7.

MDCCCCLXXXV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY.

1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

IN the apostolic age, the Church enjoyed some advantages, to which we of this day are strangers. The vast variety of gifts which were vouchsafed to

the primitive believers, tended greatly to fix their attention on the truths that were delivered, and to confirm the faith of those who heard them. On the other hand, these gifts were attended with some disadvantages; inasmuch as they gave rise to an unholy emulation in the persons who possessed them, and an undue partiality in those for whose benefit they were exercised. On the whole, we need not envy them their distinctions, since their gifts, how exalted soever they might be, were nothing in comparison of that which we, as well as they, are privileged to possess. Love is of more value than them all. Gifts might edify others; but love benefits ourselves: and, without love, all the gifts that men ever possessed were of no value. This is asserted by St. Paul in our text. But, as his assertions are of a very extraordinary kind, we shall endeavour to explain and vindicate them to your satisfaction.

I. To explain—

In order to place the passage in its true point of view, we shall explain,

1. The principle itself—

[This throughout the whole chapter is called “charity.” The generality of commentators have expressed their regret that the word “love” had not been substituted in the place of “charity,” that being confessedly the true meaning of the term used in the original. But we do not conceive the translation to be open to the objection that is urged against it: for it is not possible for any one, who reads the chapter with attention, to imagine, that it relates exclusively to alms-giving: the most ignorant reader must see, that the principle, which is here called “charity,” is far more extensive, and can by no means have so limited a sense, as these objectors would suppose them to affix to it. We, on the contrary, think that the translators intentionally preferred the term “charity,” in order to mark distinctly that the principle here spoken of is love to *man* in its utmost latitude; but that it is love to *man* only, and not love to *God*. That it must be so limited, is evident from the whole preceding and following context. The Corinthians possessed many miraculous powers, which, though given them only for the edification of the Church, were exerted by them principally for vain-glorious and selfish ends. Hence the Apostle tells them, that they defeated the very ends for

which these powers had been imparted, and trampled upon that principle of Christian love, which was of more value than all the powers that either men or angels could possess. Besides, all the properties which in this chapter are ascribed to love, shew it to have man, and man alone, for its object. And those who interpret the word as including love to God also, make the import of the whole chapter obscure and unintelligible. We therefore approve of the term “charity,” as giving to the passage its true, and definite, and more appropriate meaning.

Yet we must bear in mind, that it is *Christian* charity which is here spoken of; namely, charity founded on a regard to the authority of God who has enjoined it, and on a regard to Christ also, in and through whom all the human race may be considered as united in one great family. His example is no less binding upon us than the command of God: and therefore, though we confine the term to the love of *man* only, we understand by it *such* a love, as is founded altogether on *Christian* principles, and is combined with all other gracious affections.]

2. The assertions respecting it—

[Such in the Apostle’s judgment is the value and importance of Christian charity, that, without it *all that we can possess* is of no value, and *all that we can do* is of no value.

Without it, *all that we can possess* is of no value.—It is here supposed that a man may be able to speak with all the wisdom and eloquence both of men and angels; that he may possess a gift of prophecy so as to foretell future events; that he may have a perfect insight into all the most hidden mysteries of our religion, and an ability to solve all its difficulties; yea, that he may possess a faith whereby he may be able to remove mountains: and yet be destitute of this principle of universal charity. And certain it is that all these miraculous powers are independent of gracious affections, and have been more or less exercised by men, who, like Balaam, were altogether destitute of the grace of God. Supposing then a man to possess all these powers in their highest possible degree, and at the same time to be destitute of the principle of true charity, he would, as the Apostle says, be only “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal,” the most harsh and monotonous of all the instruments from whence any thing like music can be elicited.

Moreover, without this principle of charity, *all that we can do* is of no value. It is supposed here that a person may have such a fit of liberality as to give all his goods to feed the poor; and such a fit of zeal as to give his body to be burned; and yet be destitute of this principle. And certain it is, that there

are principles in our fallen nature capable of producing these effects in men who have never received one atom of the grace of God, or felt one spark of true charity. Many thousands of our fellow-subjects in India are awful examples of this truth; men reducing themselves to the most wretched state of want and misery, and women voluntarily burning themselves upon the funeral piles of their deceased husbands; and this from no better principle than pride and vain-glory. Similar effects are produced also by a self-righteous principle; the unhappy devotees accounting nothing too much to do or suffer in order to recommend themselves to their senseless deities. Supposing then a man to do all this, and yet to be devoid of charity, "it would profit him *nothing*," literally "*nothing*." Not one of his sins would ever be removed by it; nor would he be advanced one single step towards the favour of God: he would be as poor, and wretched, and miserable as before.]

Now these, it must be confessed, are very strong assertions: and the idea of a man going from the flames of martyrdom to the flames of hell, is so shocking, that we scarcely know how to admit it for one moment. Yet is it really true that this may be the case; as is abundantly evident from the Apostle's assertions; which now we will proceed,

II. To vindicate—

Let it be remembered that the principle, which is here supposed to be wanting, is that of universal "charity." And well may it be said, that, in the absence of that, all other things are of no value; for, where that is wanting, there can be,

1. No love to God—

[Here St. John will prove to us an infallible instructor. His words are plain and decisive: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God. *He that loveth not, knoweth not God: for God is love.*" "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen^a?" Here he not only declares the vanity and falsehood of all pretensions of love to God, whilst we are destitute of love to man, but he appeals to us respecting it, as a matter that is self-evident and incontrovertible. For a man to pretend to obey the first table of the law, whilst he

^a 1 JOHN iv. 7, 8, 20.

tramples habitually on all the duties of the second table, is an absurdity too glaring for any one seriously to maintain. If we are destitute of love to man, we cannot possibly be possessed of love to God.

Now then, we would ask, in what light must that man be viewed who has no love to God? Of what value are his *gifts*, how great or manifold soever they may be? Or of what value are his *actions*, how glorious soever they may be in the eyes of man? Can the man please God, when he does not love him? Can the man enjoy God, when he does not love him? Could he enjoy God even in heaven itself, if he did not love him? No: if it be only a fellow-creature whom we do not love, we have no pleasure in his presence, even though he himself be not the only source from whence our comfort might be drawn: how then could we be happy in God's presence, when he would be the only spring from whence even one drop of pleasure could flow? Verily, to such a man, even heaven itself would be no heaven; or rather, it would be to him as the precincts of hell.]

2. No faith in Christ—

[Love is properly the fruit of faith. Mere carnal affection, or party-spirit, may exist without any knowledge of Christ: but *Christian* charity must spring from faith in Christ, even from that faith, which, as the Apostle says, “worketh by love^b.” But here again the Apostle John shall be our guide. In immediate connexion with the fore-cited passages, he says, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him^c.” Here the argument is plain: every one that believes in Christ, loves God; and every one that loves God, loves those also who are begotten of him: consequently, if we love not those who are begotten of him, we have no love to God, nor any faith in Christ.

And what is the state of a man that has no faith in Christ? Can there be any value in any thing which he either has or does? He has no interest in Christ, no pardon of sin, no title to heaven, no hope beyond the grave: what signify then his pre-eminent talents, or his specious virtues? He may benefit others; but he cannot benefit himself: he may even “save others; but he himself will be a cast-away.” Yea, at this moment “he is in a state of condemnation, and the wrath of God abideth on him^d.”]

3. No real holiness of heart and life—

[The man that is destitute of charity tramples alike on both tables of the law. For, “the very end of the command-

^b Gal. v. 6.

^c 1 John v. 1.

^d John iii. 18, 36.

ment, (the very end for which the law was given, and which it was principally intended to effect,) is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned^e:" and this end not being answered, the whole law is made void. Again; St. Paul says, that "all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself^f:" therefore, if this one grace is so connected with every part of the law as to fulfil it all, the want of this one grace must violate it all. Once more: it is said, "Put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness^g:" it is that by which all the graces that constitute perfection are bound together, just as the armour was by the girdle that enclosed it. This therefore being wanting, no grace whatever is found in its proper place: they are altogether scattered to the winds.

What then, we would again ask, is the state of such a man? a man that defeats the one end for which the law was given; that violates it in all its parts; and leaves at the disposal of every gust of passion all the graces which it was intended to combine? We think that nothing more is wanting to confirm all the strong assertions of the Apostle, or to shew that, whatever a man may either possess or do, without charity he is nothing but a tinkling cymbal; he will be nothing to all eternity, but a miserable, self-deceiving, self-ruined hypocrite.]

From this view of Christian charity, LEARN the importance,

1. Of understanding clearly its nature—

[Certain it is that the nature of Christian charity is but little known. In truth, had it not been so fully opened in the chapter before us, it may well be doubted whether any man upon the face of the earth would have fully understood it: or rather, it may be doubted, whether any man on the face of the earth does fully understand it even now. No part of it can be understood any farther that it is experienced in the soul: and the defects of men in the practice of it shew how defective must be their views of its extent and obligations. But, it is only in proportion as we understand it, that we can have any just standard whereby to estimate our own character, or any sure directory for our conduct. But God will judge us by his perfect law, whether we understand it or not. He does not reduce his demands to the measure which we choose to fix; but requires us diligently to learn his will, and then to do it "without partiality and without hypocrisy." Our first object then must be to get a thorough insight into the requirements of his law, and then to set ourselves with all diligence to the performance of it.]

^e 1 Tim. i. 5.

^f Gal. v. 14.

^g Col. iii. 14.

2. Of ascertaining our state in relation to it—

[Often should we bring ourselves to the touchstone, to try what our state is before God. We have seen how high we may be in the estimation of men, whilst yet we are nothing in the sight of God. Perhaps there are no persons more eminent in their own eyes, than those who attract great attention by their talents, or by liberality and zeal have high credit for their attainments. But such persons often fearfully deceive their own souls^h. If we would form a right judgment of our character, let us study this chapter thoroughly, and apply to our hearts and consciences every one of those properties by which Christian charity is there distinguished. Let us further study the character of the Apostle Paul, and of our blessed Lord himself: and thus shall we know, with some considerable measure of certainty, what is God's estimate of us, and what his sentence will be upon us in the great and awful day.]

3. Of cultivating the growth of it in our souls—

[There is no measure of Christian charity with which we are to rest satisfied: we are always to be pressing forward for higher and higher attainments. St. Paul commends the Thessalonians, because "their faith grew exceedingly, and the charity of every one of them towards each other aboundedⁱ." Let us seek to merit that commendation. It is in that way only that we can make our profiting to appear, or give evidence that we are growing from babes to young men, and from young men to fathers. Love is the image of God; and the more we increase in it, the more we adorn our Christian profession, and attain "a meetness for the heavenly inheritance." Let us all then "follow earnestly this best of gifts;" and however much any of you may have attained, "we beseech you to abound more and more^k."]]

^h Gal. vi. 3.ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 3.^k 1 Thess. iv. 9, 10.

MDCCCCLXXXVI.

A DESCRIPTION OF CHARITY.

1 Cor. xiii. 4—7. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

OF all the subjects proposed to us in the Holy Scriptures, there is not one that deserves a deeper

attention than that before us. If only we consider what is said of charity in the preceding verses, and reflect on the indispensable necessity of it to our acceptance with God, we shall be led to inquire diligently into its characteristic features, and its inseparable properties: we shall not satisfy ourselves with any specious appearances, or outward acts; but shall examine, whether, and how far, this divine principle exists in our hearts. To assist you in this inquiry, we shall enter minutely into the description here given of it; and endeavour to hold up a mirror, in which every one may behold his own face. It is but too common, when subjects of this kind are discussed, to apply them to others, rather than ourselves: but, if we would hear with profit, we must think of ourselves only; and implore of God the influences of his Spirit, that “the word may come, not in word only, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,” to our souls.

There are here no less than fifteen particulars by which the principle of charity is distinguished. But we apprehend, that the two first are designed to give a general view of the subject; and that those which follow are the particulars comprehended under it.

The suffering patiently all kinds of evil, and doing cheerfully all kinds of good, are the constituent parts of true charity: and these are expressed by those two words, “Charity suffereth long, and is kind:” and St. Paul elsewhere sums up the whole of charity in these two things; “Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good^a.”

In fact, it is by these two terms that charity is depicted as existing and operating in the bosom of God himself: “Despisest thou the riches of his *goodness*, and forbearance, and *long-suffering*, not knowing that the *goodness* of God leadeth thee to repentance?” Here the words “*goodness* and *long-suffering*” are, in the original, the very same with those in the beginning of our text, “Charity *suffereth*

^a Rom. xii. 21.

long, and is kind:" from whence we may see that charity *in us* is of the same nature with charity *in God*; or, in other words, that it is *a conformity of heart to God, whose name and character is love*^b.

It is yet further observable, that there is, in the original, a marked difference between the mode in which *the general view* of the subject is stated, and *the particular parts* of it are enumerated; there being no copulative to connect the verbs. This distinction is marked also very properly in our translation; the copulative "and" being put in italics, to shew that it is not to be found in the original.

This view of the text removes all appearances of tautology, and opens an easy way for the discussion of it.

Descending thus to the consideration of the different particulars, we notice, that there is a marked difference also in the statement of them, in the former part, as compared with the latter part; the former consisting wholly of *negations*; and the latter, of *affirmations*: and thus presenting to our view,

I. The evils it excludes—

These may fitly be distributed under five heads:

1. Envy: "Charity envieth not"—

[Envy is a repining at another's prosperity, or good, which we ourselves desire to possess: and it is a principle deeply rooted in our fallen nature, insomuch that it may be seen to operate with great force even in children at the breast; so true is that testimony of the Apostle, "The spirit that dwelleth in us, lusteth to envy^c." But how contrary is this to true charity! Can we conceive a mother to envy her own child any perfection it possessed, or any benefit that has been conferred upon it? or if there were such a mother, would she not, by the common consent of all men, be thought an unnatural monster, rather than a loving parent? Real love would lead her to rejoice in all the good that accrued to her child, though she herself were not a partaker of it: and this is the invariable operation of love, wherever it exists. Know then, that, whatever distinctions or benefits any other person may attain, whilst we ourselves have failed in the pursuit of them, we should feel only pleasure in his success; and if we grudge

^b 1 John iv. 16.

^c Jam. iv. 5.

it him, and are disposed to detract from his merits, and to reduce him to a level with ourselves, we are actuated by the hateful principle of envy, and, in that instance at least, are destitute of the sublimer principle of love.]

2. Pride: "Charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly"—

[These three may properly be classed under the head of pride. The word which is translated "vaunteth not itself," is in the margin translated, "is not rash:" and this perhaps is somewhat nearer to the original; which imports, that charity is not inconsiderate, insolent, and over-bearing. This is nearly allied with a conceit of one's own attainment, and naturally leads to a violation of all that respect which is due to age, and station, and legitimate authority.]

Yet to what an extent do these evils exist! how headstrong, how self-opinionated, how presumptuous are youth in general, especially where they can give vent to their dispositions without restraint! But love is modest, sober, temperate: it pays a just deference to the sentiments of others; and willingly submits to the dictates of maturer age, and riper judgment.

If then we speak and act without a due consideration of what others may think, or a proper regard to what others may feel, or in any way that does not befit our age, our rank, our character, we violate the duties of charity; which teaches us to "esteem others better than ourselves^d," and to guard with all possible care against every thing that may give just offence, or weaken the influence of our exertions for the good of others. In a word, real charity will lead us to "prefer others in honour before ourselves^f," and to take on all occasions the lowest place^g.]

3. Selfishness: "Charity seeketh not her own"—

[Throughout the whole of this description, the Apostle seems to have had in his eye some of those particular evils which abounded in the Church at Corinth. This more especially he had occasion to reprove, both in the preceding and subsequent context. Many of them were possessed of gifts, which they used chiefly for the advancement of their own honour, when they should have improved them solely for the Church's good. And this disposition fearfully predominates in our fallen nature; "All men seek their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ^h." But true charity triumphs over all these narrow and contracted feelings: it teaches us not to seek our own ease, honour, and profit, but in entire subserviency to

^d Phil. ii. 3.

^e 1 Cor. x. 32.

^f Rom. xii. 10.

^g Luke xiv. 10.

^h Phil. ii. 21.

the good of othersⁱ; and to become the servants of all for Christ's sake^k, sacrificing our just rights^l, abridging our unquestionable liberty^m, and accommodating ourselves either to the wishes or the prejudice of othersⁿ, for the better promotion of their welfare. This is charity: but whereinsoever *self* predominates, so as to turn us from this blessed path, we are destitute of that heavenly principle, whose direction is, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth^o."]

4. Wrath: "Charity is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil"—

[It not unfrequently happens in a family, that, in the estimation of him who is at the head of it, one member can do nothing that is good; and another member, nothing that is wrong. But whence arises this? Is it that the one is so perfect as never to err; and the other so depraved, as never to do right? No: the actions of the two are seen through a different medium; the one through the medium of prejudice, and the other of love. Now such a measure of partiality as can find no fault, is far from being desirable; nor is it any part of true charity. But charity keeps us from breaking forth into wrath against an offending brother; and suffers us not to impute evil intentions to him, to aggravate his offence. Where there is a continual disposition to find fault, and a readiness to fly out into a rage on trifling occasions,—where there is a proneness to put an unkind construction on every thing, and to judge persons with severity,—there is no charity. Let us but observe how ready we are to find excuses for any one we greatly love, or even for a favourite animal that has committed a fault, and we shall see immediately what would be our conduct towards our brethren, if we had real love to them in our hearts. How ingenious are we in finding excuses for ourselves, when we have done any thing amiss! and if self-love operate so towards ourselves, would not the love of our brethren prescribe somewhat of a similar measure towards them? Yes assuredly: we should "be slow to wrath," as we find we are, comparatively at least, towards those whom we love; and ready to extenuate, rather than aggravate, what we cannot fully approve.]

5. Malice: "Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth"—

[To find pleasure in the fall or disgrace of another is the very essence of malice, the counterpart of Satan himself. Yet

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 33.

^k 1 Cor. ix. 19.

^l 1 Cor. ix. 15.

^m 1 Cor. viii. 13.

ⁿ Acts xvi. 3. and xxi. 26.

^o 1 Cor. x. 24. and Phil. ii. 4.

how universally prevalent is this malignant disposition! Has any person, especially one whom we have regarded as a superior or a rival, done any thing whereby he has lowered himself in the estimation of mankind? with what pleasure do we listen to the tale! what gratification do we feel in circulating the report! and what a satisfaction do we take, even whilst we profess to pity him, in the fall and degradation of our brother! If afterwards we find that the report was not true, or that there were circumstances which materially altered the real character of the action, do we feel the same pleasure in having our own judgment rectified, and in rectifying the misapprehensions of others? No: there is not the same gratification to our corrupt nature in believing and circulating the one, as in crediting and spreading the other: and therefore, whilst we are ready enough to propagate the evil, we leave truth to find its way as it can. But this is not the way in which love will shew itself: charity finds no pleasure in that which causes pain to another, or dishonour to God: but it is delighted with every thing which may tend to the advancement of God's honour and our brethren's good.]

In this copious description of charity, we see yet further,

II. The habits it keeps in exercise—

1. It “beareth,” or, as the word rather means, “covereth, all things”—

[Where love does not exist, there will be a readiness to spy out evil, and to spread the report of it far and wide: but where it reigns, there will be a disposition rather to cast a veil over our brother's faults, yea and over his sins too; according as it is written, “Charity will cover a multitude of sins^p.” Where the revealing of what we know is necessary for the maintenance of public justice, there love to the community will supersede the obligation of which we are now speaking: but where no necessity exists for exposing the shame of our brother, we ought as far as possible to conceal it, and to cast over it the mantle of love. This is what a man does towards those with whom he stands most intimately connected by the ties of consanguinity or friendship: and he will deal the same measure to all, in proportion as the general principle of Christian charity prevails in his soul.]

2. It “believeth all things”—

[This must of course be restricted to *good*: for to believe

hastily all manner of *evil* would be directly contrary to love. In the things which we either see or hear, there must of necessity be a great deal which cannot come under our observation. Acts are visible; but the motives which lead to them are hid from us. Results too may be visible; but all the circumstances that led to them, and the precise manner in which they were brought about, may be very imperfectly known by us: and yet on these depends the innocence or criminality of the persons engaged in them. Now charity will not judge from outward appearances, or from partial information; but will suppose and believe that there are many things connected with the event, which, if fully known, would in some measure, if not altogether, justify the person condemned. In our courts of law, the judge always considers himself as, in some degree, counsel for the person accused. Now this is what we should all be, in our daily conduct: a person accused is, as it were, brought to our bar for trial: and, instead of pronouncing a sentence of condemnation upon him instantly on the statement of his accuser, we should suspend our judgment till we know what he has to say in vindication of himself: and if we are not likely to gain that fuller information, we should take for granted that there are some circumstances, though unknown to us, that would give a different colour to the transaction, and constrain us to give a sentence in his favour.]

3. It “hopeth all things”—

[The reports we hear may be so full and circumstantial, and be corroborated by such a weight of evidence, that we can scarcely withhold our assent to the statement. Yet, if we cannot altogether *believe* that the accused person is less guilty than he is represented, we should “*hope*” it. We should not so definitively pass judgment on him, as if it were impossible for us to err; or as if more perfect information might not give us a more favourable view of his conduct. If we are compelled to condemn him for an evil *act*, we should hope that the act was not formed into a habit: or, if we are constrained to lament that his iniquities are become a habit, still we should hope that he is not altogether incorrigible; we should not despair of seeing a change in his favour, or give him over as altogether reprobate. This is the way in which a loving parent acts towards his son; and it is the way in which we should act towards all the human race: we should believe, where we cannot see; and hope, where we cannot believe; and cherish desire, where we can scarcely entertain a hope.]

4. It “endureth all things”—

[Much will we bear from a beloved object, many unkindnesses, and many injuries: and, especially if we have a prospect

of ultimately benefiting his soul, we can bear up under his ill treatment with much long-suffering and forbearance. This at least is the proper effect of love; as we see in St. Paul, who says, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." It is not a slight provocation or two that love will overlook, but a long-continuance of provocations: it will forgive, not once, or seven times, but seventy times seven. It will continue to bless even the man that loads us with curses, and to accumulate benefits on him who seeks only to do us evil. It so endures evil, as "not to be overcome by it;" and makes such returns for it, as to "overcome it with good." Its great aim is, so to "heap coals of fire on the head of an adversary, as to melt him into love." In this consists the triumphs of the God of love; and in this will every one who is born of God endeavour to resemble his heavenly Father.]

Hence we may SEE,

1. How different is true religion from what men generally apprehend!

[Far be it from us to undervalue gifts of any kind, especially of those which have a favourable aspect on religion: and still less would we speak lightly of those alternations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, which many experience in their religious course. But still we must say, that vital religion is different from them all, as a building is from the scaffold that is used for its erection. Religion is a conformity to the Divine image: religion is the law of God written in the heart: religion is love; love in all its bearings, and in all its exercises. Happy would it be if this matter were better understood by those who profess religion: but, with too many, religion has its seat in the ear and in the tongue, rather than in the heart; and operates rather in a way of conceit and talkativeness, and uncharitable censures of those who differ from us, than in meekness and modesty, benevolence and beneficence, forbearance and forgiveness. But let no man deceive himself: just so much as we have of real, active, and habitual charity, so much we have of true religion, and no more.]

2. How little is there of true religion in the world!

[Look into the world, and see what are the dispositions and habits of all around us: what do we see, but pride and envy, wrath and malice, self-seeking and self-indulgence? The whole world is full of uncharitableness: nothing is to be seen or heard but mutual censures and bitter animosities. The real actings of love are as little prevalent, I had almost said, as in hell itself. The laws of the land, and the habits of society,

keep many from those violent breaches of charity which would disturb the public peace: but their secret heart-burnings, towards those who have injured or insulted them, shew sufficiently how little there is of true charity in their hearts.

Would to God that this were not the case also in the Church of God! But it is a lamentable truth, that in Christian societies there is much of this unkind feeling in one towards another; brethren alienated from each other by some trifling differences, and even harder to be reconciled to each other than the ungodly world. "O tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ascalon, lest the uncircumcised triumph." But let professors look well to this matter: for they shall be judged, not by their profession, but by their practice: and, however eminent they may be in the estimation of men, they will receive their doom from God, according to the actings of this principle in their hearts and lives.]

3. How thankful should we be for the rich provisions of the Gospel!

[Who amongst us could stand, if we were to be justified only by our obedience to this law? Who would venture his salvation upon it, even for one single day? Alas! "in many things we all offend:" there is not a human being who does not come very short of the requirements of perfect charity. We need then, all of us, to wash in "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness;" and to seek an interest in that Saviour, who alone fulfilled the law in all its full extent.

Nor can we obey this law *at all*, any farther than we are assisted by divine grace. We need the influences of the Holy Spirit, to mortify and subdue the risings of uncharitableness within us. Whatever we may have attained, "the flesh still lusteth against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would." But, blessed be God! the Holy Spirit is promised unto all who desire his gracious influences, and his operation shall be effectual for the ends and purposes for which he is given.

Whilst then we strive to be holy as God is holy, let us seek all our help from above, and "live by faith on the Son of God, who hath loved us, and given himself for us."]

MDCCCLXXXVII.

THE SAINTS' VIEWS IN HEAVEN.

1 Cor. xiii. 9—12. *We know in part, and we prophecy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when*

I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

IN the chapter before us, the Apostle expatiates upon the nature of true charity; developing it in all its properties, and in all its operations. And, having done this with a singular felicity of thought and expression, he declares the superiority of this grace above every thing else, whether gifts or graces; and *that* too, not only on account of its own intrinsic excellence, but on account of its duration; because, when all other things shall have passed away, this will endure through eternal ages.

To enter fully into the Apostle's views, we must notice, in succession,

I. His statement of the subject—

Whatever we possess here, we have it only “in part”—

[God, in his mercy, has given us a revelation: but this revelation contains but a very small part of what God might have revealed, if it had pleased him to do so. And the knowledge which we have of what he has revealed, is extremely partial and superficial. What know we of God, and his perfections? of Christ, and his offices? of the Holy Spirit, and his operations^a? What know we of the human heart, and its unsearchable depravity^b? What know we of the “riches of Christ^c,” and of all the wonders of redemption, “the length and breadth, and depth and height, of which surpass” all finite comprehension^d? — — —]

And even what knowledge we do possess shall in the eternal world “be done away”—

[We shall have no need of the written word to teach us, when once we are brought into the presence of God; nor will our present imperfect conceptions of it abide with us. The word, which at present is to us as the polar star, will then vanish from our sight; and the views which we now have of it, like those of the early dawn, will be dispelled; both the one and the other giving way, as darkness before the noon-day sun — — — To what purpose would a man carry a taper in the

^a Matt. xi. 27.

^b Jer. xvii. 9.

^c Eph. iii. 8.

^d Eph. iii. 18, 19.

day-time? Even so the light within us, and the light without, will add nothing to the brightness of the objects in heaven, or to the clearness of our perception of them, when once we shall behold them in their “perfect” state.]

But this will receive additional light from,

II. His illustration of it—

We all know how imperfect the conceptions of a child are, in comparison of what he possesses when he is become a man—

[A child speaks without reflection, chooses^e without judgment, reasons^f without solidity: but, when he becomes a man he exercises all his faculties in a more appropriate and becoming manner. He no longer utters the unmeaning and senseless sounds which emanated from him in his infant state, or makes the trifling observations that befitted him when he first began to speak. Nor does he set his mind on things which are of no value, in preference to those that are of real and important use. Nor, though he still may err in his reasonings, does he any longer found his conclusions on premises which have no apparent connexion with them. His intellectual powers being expanded by use and exercise, he dismisses, as unworthy of him, the puerilities which he once affected.]

Still more imperfect are our present views of eternal things, in comparison of what they will be in a future state—

[Now “we see them all as in a mirror, darkly:” they appear to us as a riddle or enigma, which we cannot without great difficulty comprehend^g. The incarnation of God’s only dear Son, his substitution in the place of sinful man, the atonement offered by him for sin, his intercession for us at the right hand of God, his appointment to be the Head of vital influence to his Church and people, our union with him by faith—what know we of these, and ten thousand other mysteries of our holy religion? the darkest riddle that ever was propounded is more level with our apprehension than these mysterious truths. And what know we of the felicity of heaven? What conception can we form of the soul’s exercises in its disembodied state; or of the glory of the Godhead, as shining forth to the view of the glorified saints and angels? Even the resurrection of the body, what know we about it? or what notion have we of a spiritual body? We must all confess, that our present views are so indistinct, as scarcely to deserve the name of

^e ἐφρόνουν, sapiebam. Compare Rom. viii. 5. the Greek.

^f λογίζομαι.

^g See the Greek.

knowledge. But when we shall behold God "face to face," and "see the Lord Jesus Christ as he is," then will our faculties be wonderfully enlarged, and our perceptions be infinitely more clear. O what views shall we then have of our own sinfulness, and of the Redeemer's love! What an apprehension shall we then have of the perfections of our God, as united and harmonizing in the great work of redemption! Our knowledge will then arise, not, as now, from a variety of ideas communicated in succession to the mind, but from one intuitive perception: we shall see God, and the things of God, in some measure as God himself sees us: he sees the whole of us, even the inmost recesses of our souls, all at once, with equal clearness in every part: and somewhat of the same kind will be our knowledge of him, though, of course, in an infinitely lower degree: for "then shall we know even as also we are known."]

SEE, then,

1. In what light we should regard death—

[To an ungodly man, indeed, death will be terrible, beyond all conception; because it will introduce him to a perfect knowledge of all those terrors, which, in this world, he would not believe. But to the true Christian, death is the door of entrance into glory. It is the friendly messenger sent to us by God, in answer to that prayer of our blessed Saviour; "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me^h." Who, then, would deprecate it? Who should not account it gain, and number it amongst his treasuresⁱ? Who should not desire to depart, that he may be with Christ^k?" Methinks it is a shame to Christians to be wedded to life, except for the purpose of honouring God, and advancing in a meetness for the heavenly inheritance — — —]

2. In what light we should regard this present life—

[This is a state of childhood; and, as children are educated for the purpose of acting their part as men upon earth, so should we be preparing daily to act our part in heaven. We should now be searching into all those truths which will there be more fully revealed to us, and be obtaining those dispositions which will qualify us for the enjoyment of them — — — And here let me say, that the great and learned will do well to remember what they *are*; and the poor and unlearned will do well to look forward to what they *will be*. Our felicity above will be proportioned, not to our intellectual, but moral, attainments: and as, even in this world, "God often reveals to babes and

^h John xvii. 24.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^k Phil. i. 21, 23.

sucklings what he has hid from the wise and prudent," so much more, in the eternal world, will he most largely impart both knowledge and happiness to those who, in the present state, evince most fully the teachableness and humility of little children¹.

To all then I say, If ye will be men indeed, "put away childish things." Put away your foolish communications, your corrupt affections, and your vain reasonings. Form your judgment, and exercise your inclinations, in accordance with the word of God. Begin to view things, here, as you will view them hereafter. Be no longer children, but men. If you look at the world around you, what are they but children of a larger growth? The dispositions and habits of those most advanced in life are, for the most part, not at all different from what they were in the earlier stages of their existence: earthly vanities still retain their ascendant over their minds; and the realities of the eternal world have as little influence over them as ever. Let it not be so, my brethren; but now begin to obtain those views, to cherish those desires, and to follow those pursuits, which a more enlightened judgment will dictate, and which will approve themselves as wise in the eternal world.]

¹ Matt. xviii. 1, 4.

MDCCCCLXXXVIII.

FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY, COMPARED.

1 Cor. xiii. 13. *And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*

THE scope of the whole chapter is, to shew the superiority of Christian love or charity to all the gifts that were so erroneously estimated, and so ostentatiously displayed, in the Church of Corinth. In the course of his argument, the Apostle enumerates the principal offices of charity, and marks with singular accuracy and minuteness its proper qualities. The last of the properties which he mentions is, that it "never faileth;" whilst all miraculous powers, of whatever kind they be, are but for the short period of this present life. *They*, he observes, will soon vanish; but *this*, instead of disappearing, will endure in uninterrupted exercise, and be continued in un-

deviating perfection for evermore. Thus *incidentally* he is led to speak of the whole experience of Christians in relation to the objects of their faith and hope: they view them all but indistinctly, and know them very imperfectly; having little better conception of them than of a riddle, or enigma^a, in which some leading particulars only are set forth; and the rest is left, as it were, as matter of conjecture. In short, Christians, not excepting the Apostle himself, are but children, in relation to the deep things of God; and, when they shall be exalted to heaven, they will discard all their puerile notions respecting them, just as they now do the weaknesses of childhood on their arrival at man's estate^b. The Apostle having thus, unintentionally as it were, been drawn from the consideration of miraculous *gifts* to the mention of Christian *graces*, proceeds to assert the superiority of love among the sister graces of faith and hope, as he had before shewn its superiority to all the miraculous powers that ever were possessed: "There now remain" (for constant use and exercise) "faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

To confirm this declaration, we will shew,

I. The distinguishing excellencies of faith and hope—

These, with love, form the cardinal graces of a Christian: and they are indispensable to his happiness, both in this world and in the world to come. That we may know how to appreciate their value, we will distinctly notice the excellencies,

1. Of faith—

[This, when infused into the soul by the Spirit of God, and called forth into exercise according to the will of God, is a principle truly wonderful. It beholds things that are invisible; and presents to the eye of the mind all the perfections and purposes of God himself. It is conversant with all that God has ever revealed; and especially with that stupendous mystery, the redemption of the world by God's only dear Son, and the restoration of men to the Divine image by the influence

^a See the original, and the marginal translation of ver. 12.

^b ver. 11.

and operation of the Holy Ghost. It goes farther still; and apprehends all that God has ever promised, and appropriates to itself all the blessings of his everlasting covenant. It seizes by a holy violence^c all that God *is*, and all that God *has*, even all his glory; and invests the soul with all of it, as its present and everlasting portion. It brings Christ himself down into the soul^d; fills it with his love, and enriches it with all his fulness^e. As for difficulties they all vanish, and are dispelled by the power of faith. There is a kind of omnipotence in this grace. No enemy can withstand it: "All things are possible to him that believeth." The more dark our way is, the more scope there is for the exercise of this grace, and the more it triumphs. In this point of view, it, far beyond any other grace, reflects honour on God: it fixes on the Divine perfections, and calls every one of them to its aid: it presses even justice itself into its service; and never will let go its claims upon God's mercy and truth: it finds quite sufficient encouragement in a single promise. See it in Abraham: he assured himself, that though Isaac should be slain and reduced to ashes, he should be raised again from the dead, and the promises should be fulfilled in him. And thus does faith operate in the hearts of all; and, in proportion as it operates, secures to us a victory over all the enemies of our salvation.]

2. Of hope—

[This is a *less comprehensive* grace than faith: for faith has respect to every thing that is revealed, whether past, present, or future; and to things evil, as well as good: whereas hope respects futurity only, and only that which is either really, or in its own conception, good. It is also a *less honourable* grace than faith: for its existence is derived from faith, and altogether dependent on it; and it has respect only to our own personal happiness, whilst faith rises above self, and seeks to advance the glory of God.

Still however it is a grace of vast importance; and the entire absence of it is the most striking character of hell, where all are immersed in darkness and despair. This is the grace which encourages and supports the soul in all its conflicts with sin and Satan. In the panoply of God it holds a most conspicuous place: it is the helmet that protects the head, and the breast-plate that defends the heart: so that, where hope is kept in exercise, Satan cannot inflict any deadly wound. True, he may raise storms and tempests around the soul, and menace it with instant destruction: but hope casts "its anchor within the vail;" and, deriving thence "a sure and steadfast" support, defies the utmost efforts of our great adversary^f.

^c Matt. xi. 12. ^d Eph. iii. 17. ^e Eph. iii. 18, 19. ^f Heb. vi. 19.

How often would the strongest believer have failed, if he had not received succour from this grace! "I should have fainted," says David, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living^g." It was no less by this grace, than by faith itself, that the saints of old were enabled to endure the great fight of afflictions which they were called to sustain^h. On this account hope is said to save us, no less than faithⁱ: for though faith brings us into the way of salvation, it is hope that enables us to endure unto the end^k.]

After such a view of faith and hope, it will almost be thought, that no higher commendation can be bestowed on any other grace: but there is abundant scope yet left for shewing,

II. The superior excellence of charity—

Of the three graces, the Apostle expressly asserts, that "the greatest is charity." And its superiority will be found,

1. In its nature—

[Faith and hope, how excellent soever they be, derive all their value from the objects on which they terminate. If they had respect only to human testimony, and temporal objects, they would be of little worth: it is their connexion with God and with eternity, that so elevates them in the scale of Christian graces. But charity has an essential goodness in itself, irrespective of any objects toward whom it may be exercised. If we could suppose that the whole human race both in heaven and earth were swept away, so that we could never find a being towards whom the grace of charity could be exercised, still would the disposition itself be good. As God himself would have been good, even though no creature had ever existed towards whom his goodness should be displayed; so would the grace of charity be good, though there never should be found any scope for its exercise. It is the image of God upon the soul. God himself has no higher character than love: and, if in this character we resemble him, we have the highest excellence of which our nature is capable.

Only let us consider what the existence of charity in the soul supposes. It supposes the subjugation of all the evils that are opposed to love; as pride, envy, hatred, wrath, selfishness; and the presence of all the virtues which were in Christ Jesus. They were all comprehended in this single word, love; and

^g Ps. xxvii. 13.

^h Heb. xi. 26, 35.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 24, 25.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 58. Gal. vi. 9.

consequently, the existence of this grace in the soul most assimilates us to Christ, "in whom was no sin, and in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

Nor should it be overlooked, that the production of love in the soul was the end for which all God's other mercies were vouchsafed: for *that* even faith and hope were given; nor have they any value, any farther than they are conducive to this end: and consequently love, for which alone they are given, must be greater than they; just as health, for which alone medicine is given, is better than medicine, which is valuable only as it is subservient to the preservation, or re-establishment, of health. *The end* must of necessity be greater than *the means*.]

2. In its duration—

[Faith and hope must soon cease; the one terminating in sight, and the other being consummated in fruition. But not so the grace of love: *that* will endure to all eternity; the exercise of it being the one employment and blessedness of heaven. The other graces which have been instrumental to the formation of this, will be no longer wanted, when this is perfected in the soul: they will therefore be dismissed, as having no longer any scope for exercise.

But when the scaffolding is removed, the building will appear in all its glory, the most wonderful monument of the power and grace of Christ. Then indeed will Christ "be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe;" for every one of them will then "be fully like him, when they shall see him as he is."

Thus, how excellent soever the graces of faith and hope may be, that of charity far excels them both: for those will find no place in heaven; but this will remain an everlasting source of blessedness to man, and an eternal theme of honour to our God.]

Seeing, however, that during this present life "*these three remain*," and are to be cultivated **with** incessant care, we will close the subject with some DIRECTIONS for the exercise of them :

1. Keep them ever united in your hearts—

[No one of them can be dispensed with: if one be wanting, we must perish. We must indeed keep each of them in its place, and assign to each its proper office. We must not think that faith can save us, if it do not "work by love;" or that hope can benefit us, if it do not "purify us as Christ is pure;" or that love can supersede the necessity of faith in the work of our justification before God. We can be justified by

faith only: but by love we must prove the truth of our faith. We must not imagine, that, because love is greater than faith, we are therefore to be saved by love. The eye is more excellent than the ear; but it cannot on that account perform the office of the ear, nor supersede the necessity of hearing, in order to the perfection of our present state: faith, hope, and love, have all their distinct offices, and must all be exercised for their respective ends;—faith, to justify our souls; hope, to keep us steadfast in our spiritual course; and love, to form our meetness for the heavenly inheritance. Let all then be sought, and all be exercised, that God may be glorified in all.]

2. Let them all be held fast, whatever trials you may have to encounter in the exercise of them—

[No one of them can be maintained without much difficulty. Your great adversary will assault them all in their turn. In Adam he succeeded to destroy them all: and he would succeed to root them out of our hearts also, if the Lord Jesus did not secure, by his continual intercession, the establishment of them in our souls¹. Not that they can be maintained without strenuous and unintermitted exertions on our part. We must “watch and pray that we enter not into temptation:” and when temptation comes, we must “not stagger at the promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God.” We must also “hold fast the rejoicing of our hope firm unto the end^m.” Under the influence of love too, we must “let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.” Thus shall we “grow up into Christ as our living Head;” thus shall we attain “the full measure of the stature” which he has ordained for us; and thus shall we be fitted for those regions of love, where we shall completely resemble Christ, and participate, with all the myriads of his redeemed, the glory and felicity of the God of love.]

¹ Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^m Heb. iii. 6.

MDCCCLXXXIX.

CHRIST A DYING AND A RISEN SAVIOUR.

1 Cor. xv. 1, 2. *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.*

SCARCELY had the good seed of the Gospel been sown in the world, before Satan, by his agents,

scattered tares, which in the earlier stages of their growth could not easily be distinguished from them, and from which the field will never be wholly freed until the harvest. The resurrection itself, that most fundamental doctrine of Christianity, on which every other doctrine rests, was denied by many. A Sadducean spirit of infidelity was imported into the Church from among the Jewish converts, as a vain philosophy was from among the Gentiles; and both concurred to bring into doubt the resurrection from the dead;—the one denying that it ever could take place, and the other asserting that it was only a mystical change which had taken place already: and between them both “the faith of many was overthrown.” St. Paul therefore, in the close of this epistle, set himself to counteract these errors, and to establish, for the benefit of the Church in all future ages, the truth which he had invariably maintained. He first shews that Christ had risen; and from thence he proceeds to prove that we also shall rise in like manner. But it is with the former position alone that we are concerned at present, that alone being referred to in the words before us; from which we shall be led to shew you,

1. What was the Gospel which Paul preached—

This is told us more fully in the words following our text.

The Apostle preached, that Christ had both died and risen according to the Scriptures—

[The Scriptures of the Old Testament had invariably asserted that Christ should suffer, and that he should rise again on the third day. Both these things were in some degree intimated in the first promise, that “the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head;” but they were more plainly revealed in the institutions of the Mosaic law, especially in the ordinance of the two birds; the one of which was killed, and the other, when dipped in the blood of the one that had been killed, being suffered to fly away^a: as also in the appointment of the scape-goat, which carried into the wilderness all the sins which had been previously expiated by the blood of another

^a Lev. xiv. 49—53.

goat that had been slain^b. Both the one and the other had also been subjects of prophecy; his death being foretold in all its minutest circumstances — — — and his resurrection being fixed to a precise time after it, even the third day, before any change towards corruption should have taken place upon his body^c.

What the Scriptures had thus plainly foretold, was in due time accomplished. The death of Christ was known to the whole Jewish nation, thousands of whom were spectators of it: nor was his resurrection less clearly ascertained; as even the falsehood invented to conceal it fully attests. The variety of occasions on which our Lord appeared to his Disciples after his resurrection, once to above five hundred brethren at once, left no possibility of doubt respecting it^d: and to testify of this was the great work committed, in the first instance to the twelve Apostles, and afterwards to the Apostle Paul, to whom Jesus appeared in a vision, on purpose that he might be, in that respect, on a par with all the other Apostles.]

This he calls the Gospel—

[This, in truth, is the Gospel: and it comprehends all that is necessary for us to know. That “Christ died for our sins, and rose again for our justification,” is the sum and substance of that mystery, which God from all eternity devised for the redemption of fallen man, and which is unfolded to us in the writings of the New Testament. We may expatiate upon the various parts of this mystery, so as to exhibit them more clearly and fully to your view; but we can never add to it: to attempt to add any thing to it, were to destroy it utterly. There is no redemption but through the death of Christ; no salvation, but through his renovated life^e — — —]

St. Paul having stated what the Gospel is, proceeds to shew—

II. In what manner it should be regarded by us—

The Corinthians “had received it into their hearts,” and were at that time “standing in it;” and this shews us what we also must do—

1. We must “receive it” into our hearts by faith—

[We must “receive it” *as true*. There must be no doubt in our minds respecting it. We must have no more doubt of Christ expiating our guilt by his death, or of his rising to carry on in heaven the work he began on earth, than

^b Lev. xvi. 8—10.

^c Jonah i. 17. Ps. xvi. 9, 10.

^d ver. 5—8.

^e Rom. v. 10.

of our own existence. We must be thoroughly established in these great and fundamental truths. To question either the one or the other of them in any degree, were little better than to renounce Christianity altogether.

We must receive it also *as suitable*, yea, as exactly suited to our necessities. We must feel that we need precisely such an atonement as he offered for us; and that we also need a living Saviour, who shall make continual intercession for us with the Father, and communicate to us, out of his own inexhaustible fulness, all those supplies of grace and strength as our necessities require. It is this view of the correspondence between the offices of Christ and our necessities, and a consequent affiance in him for the supply of our wants, that constitutes the very essence of saving faith.

We must receive it also *as sufficient* for us. This great mystery of godliness is absolutely perfect. Nothing can be added to it. And of this we should be fully convinced. We should see that there is in his death a sufficient "propitiation for the sins of the whole world:" and that there is in him such a fulness of all spiritual gifts, that "he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him."

In this way is his Gospel to be received, and thus it is that "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness."]

2. We must "stand fast in it" even to the end—

[Nothing must be suffered to turn us away from this faith. We must brave all *persecutions*, and rather lay down our life than deny the Saviour in any manner. "It is he only who will lose his life for Christ's sake, that shall find it unto life eternal." Nor must we yield to the influence of *temptations* of any kind, so as to be drawn aside by them. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," if enjoyed in ever so great a degree, will but ill repay us for the loss which we shall sustain by suffering them to choke the good seed of Gospel truth: for "if any man draw back, my soul," says God, "shall have no pleasure in him." Neither must *Satan*, that subtle adversary, prevail against us by his *devices*. In ten thousand ways will he endeavour to "turn us from the simplicity that is in Christ:" but with "the sword of the Spirit, and the shield of faith" we must resist him till we are crowned with victory, and see him "bruised under our feet." We shall then, and then only, "be partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end^f."]

In the Corinthians themselves we see,

^f Heb. iii. 14.

III. The benefits that will accrue to those who duly receive it—

St. Paul says of them, that “they were saved by it :” and this benefit we confidently assure to all who embrace the Gospel with their whole hearts.

1. They shall be brought into a state of acceptance with God—

[When our Lord gave his Disciples their commission to preach his Gospel, he expressly authorized them to declare, that “all who believed it should be saved.” And in all the book of God there is not to be found so much as one single word against a penitent believer. “All who believe,” says St. Paul, “are justified from all things :” even sins of a crimson dye are so washed as to be made “white as snow.”]

2. They shall have the earnest and foretaste of the heavenly glory—

[There is no limit to the blessings promised to the true believer. The Spirit of God shall be poured out upon him, to reveal all the Father’s love, and all the glory of Christ, to the soul. “He will glorify Christ, and take of the things that are his, and shew them unto us.” He will be in us “a Spirit of adoption, enabling us to cry, Abba, Father :” He “will witness to our spirits that we are the children of God :” He will give us “an earnest of our eternal inheritance,” and “seal us unto the day of complete redemption.”]

3. They shall be brought in safety to the full possession of their everlasting inheritance—

[It is here supposed that they “stand fast in the faith ;” for if they “make shipwreck of the faith,” they cannot hope for the blessings which are promised to those only who “endure unto the end.” Hence is that caution given in our text ; “Ye are saved, if ye keep in memory (and hold fast to the end) what I have preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” If our faith be only a dead faith, it will be in vain : for in this sense even “the devils believe and tremble.” But, if our faith be living and lively, we need not fear. *That* never shall be exercised in vain. *That* shall overcome every thing that is opposed to it, and shall remove all the mountains that oppose our spiritual progress. Only live truly by faith on the Son of God as having loved you and given himself for you, and God pledges himself that “none shall ever pluck you out of his hands,” and that “you shall never perish, but shall have everlasting life.” By the exercise of this “faith you shall be kept by the power of God to a full and everlasting

salvation ;” for the Gospel still is, no less than in the Apostolic age, “ the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”]

We would IMPROVE this subject,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[Have you received this Gospel as you ought? We ask not whether you have a mere notional and speculative belief of it; for that is common to all who bear the Christian name: but have you such a faith in Christ as enables you to rejoice in all that he has done, and is yet doing, for you? Do you glory in him, and renounce every other ground of hope, and “ cleave to him with full purpose of heart?” Do not deceive yourselves in relation to these things; for no faith is saving but that which brings you daily to the foot of his cross, and causes you to receive daily out of his fulness all the blessings which you stand in need of.]

2. In a way of caution—

[Those who are fettered by human systems pass over such cautions as are given in our text: but we dare not act thus. We are persuaded that cautions against apostasy are as necessary in their place as promises of perseverance. Attend then to the caution about “ holding fast” what has been preached to you. Innumerable are the cautions given us in the Scriptures upon this head: and it is by a salutary fear of apostasy that God will keep us^g. “ Beware then lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness^h.” Know where your strength is, even in your risen and exalted Saviour; and live altogether by faith in him, “ holding fast your confidence, and the rejoicing of your hope firm unto the endⁱ.”]

3. In a way of encouragement—

[Cleave thus unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and “ ye shall be saved.” However numerous or powerful your enemies may be, they shall not prevail against you: for “ greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” If indeed Christ be not able to keep you, then you may well give way to fears: but, if his death be a sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world, and all power in heaven and in earth be committed to him for the use of his Church and people, then you may dismiss all fear: for, though only a worm in yourselves, you shall “ thresh the mountains.” Be strong then, ye fearful and faint-hearted: for “ he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, but will bring

^g 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^h 2 Pet. iii. 17.

ⁱ Heb. iii. 6.

forth judgment unto victory." He has said that "of those who have been given him he will lose none;" and he is faithful who hath promised. "Fear not; only believe: and according to your faith it shall be unto you."]

MDCCCCXC.

ALL OF GRACE.

1 Cor. xv. 10. *By the grace of God I am what I am.*

EVERY one, however exalted, may find points of comparison in which he is inferior to others; and, instead of envying the superiority of others in those respects, it becomes him contentedly to acquiesce in the Divine appointments, and thankfully to adore God for whatever blessings he enjoys.

St. Paul, in descanting upon the resurrection of our Lord, has occasion to mention the different manifestations of himself which Christ had vouchsafed to his Apostles after he had risen from the dead. And in these respects, as well as in the advantages which the other Apostles had enjoyed from the instructions and example of their Divine Master, during the whole period of his ministry on earth, he acknowledged his inferiority to them: for though at a subsequent period Christ had honoured him also with an immediate sight of his person, he considered himself as far less honoured by this than the other Apostles had been; and, having been himself a persecutor, whilst they were the faithful servants of their Lord, he regarded himself as no better than an abortion in comparison of the children. But still he was not without many grounds of thankfulness, which he was most ready to acknowledge: "I am not worthy to be called an Apostle," says he; "but by the grace of God I am what I am."

This declaration of his we propose to consider in a two-fold point of view:

I. As a speculative truth—

1. This assertion was true in the Apostle's case—

[View him *in his first conversion*, and there can be no doubt but that the mercy vouchsafed to him was all of grace. He was a bitter persecutor of the Church of Christ. He was a volunteer in this bloody service: and, of his own accord, sought from the Jewish Sanhedrim a commission to search out, even in a foreign country, all who professed the Christian faith, and to bring them indiscriminately, whether men or women, bound to Jerusalem. In this very employment he was actually engaged, and was come near to the very city where he hoped to seize the victims of his cruel bigotry, when the Lord Jesus Christ arrested him in his mad career, and by his special grace converted him to the faith which he was labouring to destroy^a. It is further observable, that he alone of all the party heard distinctly the voice that spake to him, though they beheld the light which shined with preternatural splendour round about them^b: and he alone of all the party, as far as we know, was converted unto God. What was there in his spirit and conduct that *merited* such a merciful distinction? Or to what can we refer this mercy but to the free and sovereign grace of God? Here we are compelled to acknowledge an election altogether of grace: and in this interpretation of the event we are fully justified by the assertion of St. Paul, who traces it to a determination of the Deity long previous to the period when it took place, even to a fore-ordained "separation of him from his mother's womb^c."

Through *the whole of his subsequent life* the mercies vouchsafed to him must be traced to the same source. All his eminent attainments, and all his super-abundant labours, were fruits of the same electing love, and the same effectual grace. This he confessed to the latest hour of his life: he declared, that "in him, that is, in his flesh, dwelt no good thing^d;" and that his sufficiency even for so much as a good thought was altogether of God alone^e. And in reference to this truth he displayed in the passage before us a peculiar jealousy: for being, in vindication of himself, constrained to say, that he had laboured more abundantly than any other of the Apostles, he adds with holy jealousy for the honour of his God, "yet not I;" "yet, not I, but the grace of God that was with me^f."

Thus, to say the least, respecting the Apostle Paul the assertion in our text was true, "By the grace of God he was what he was." But,]

2. It is true with respect to us also—

[What is the state of every man previous to his conversion? Are we not all "dead in trespasses and sins?" Have

^a Acts xxii. 4—8.

^b Acts ix. 7. with xxii. 9.

^c Gal. i. 15.

^d Rom. vii. 18.

^e 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^f ver. 10.

we not a "carnal mind that is enmity against God?" Do we not "walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind?" and are we not all "children of wrath, even as others?" What then is there in us that can operate as a motive with God to bestow his grace upon us rather than upon others? It is clear enough, that the same word which operates effectually on some to the conversion of their souls, produces on others no other effect than that of exciting greater hostility against the Gospel^g. To what can this be ascribed but to the sovereign grace of God, whose gifts are his own, and who divideth to every man severally as he will? It is also plain, that many under less advantageous circumstances are turned from the power of Satan unto God, whilst others, with far greater advantages, are left still in bondage to sin and Satan: And what other account can be given of this, than that which our Lord himself supplies, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight^h?"

During the whole remainder of our lives it is the same grace which operates even to the end. Demas apostatizes; and Luke perseveresⁱ: Peter repents; and Judas commits suicide: Blessed Saviour, who would not prove chaff, if thou didst leave him to be sifted by his great adversary? and whose faith would not fail, if thou didst not intercede for him in the hour of trial^k? If any one of us be kept unto salvation, it is by thy power and grace alone^l: thou, who hast been "the Author of our faith, must also be the Finisher^m:" and, when the head-stone of thy spiritual temple shall be brought forth, we must cry, "Grace, grace unto itⁿ."

Thus in our own case, as well as in the Apostle's, the glory of all that is good must be given to God alone; who "hath loved us with an everlasting love, and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn us^o."]

But from the speculative view of the Apostle's assertion, let us proceed to notice it,

II. As a practical acknowledgment—

Speculation is of no further value than as it leads to practical results. But the forementioned truth is discarded by many under the idea of its being replete with injury to the souls of men. In its source, it is supposed to spring from pride; and in its tendency

^g Acts xviii. 6—8.

^h Matt. xi. 25, 26.

ⁱ Compare Col. iv. 14. with 2 Tim. iv. 10, 11.

^k Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^l 1 Pet. i. 5.

^m Heb. xii. 2.

ⁿ Zech. iv. 7.

^o Jer. xxxi. 3.

to lead to a total disregard of all moral virtue. Let us then inquire into,

1. Its source—

[Does it indeed proceed from pride? Those who cannot endure the thought of God's sovereignty, will affirm confidently that it does: and in reference to all who maintain the doctrine of election, they will exclaim, "These men fancy themselves the special favourites of heaven." But let me ask, Who are the proud? they who acknowledge themselves to be only as parts of one vast mass of clay, of which the potter, agreeably to his own sovereign will, and for the praise of the glory of his own grace, has taken a part, to form of it a vessel of honour for his own use^p; or those who assert that they were selected because they were of a finer quality than the mass that was left behind? Who are the proud? they who say with the Apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am;" or those who say, "By my own strength, and on account of my own superior goodness, I am what I am?" Who, I say, are the proud? they who accept heaven solely as the free gift of God in Christ Jesus; or they who expect to purchase it at a price which they themselves shall pay? The belief of the doctrines of predestination and election is not founded in pride, but in humility, and in a deep conviction that we *are* nothing, and *have* nothing, and *can do* nothing, but what of itself deserves God's wrath and indignation. It is the denial of these doctrines that proceeds from pride; because it argues a conceit that we have something originally, and of ourselves, which *merits* the distinction that we hope for in a future world, and to which our ultimate salvation must, in part at least, if not altogether, be ascribed. Will any man say that Paul was actuated by pride, when he said, "Whom God did predestinate, them he also called, and justified, and glorified^q?" — — — No man ever had a higher sense of the dignity conferred upon him, than Paul had: nor had ever man a deeper sense of his own unworthiness: "I am less than the least of all saints:" "I am nothing^r." And the more deeply we feel our unworthiness, the more cordially shall we acquiesce in his humiliating statements of the freeness and sovereignty of divine grace.]

2. Its tendency—

[A belief of these doctrines, it is supposed, will produce a laxness in morals. But was the Apostle regardless of morality?

^p Rom. ix. 21.

^q Rom. viii. 30. See also Eph. i. 4—6, 9, 11. and 2 Tim. i. 9.

^r Eph. iii. 8. 2 Cor. xii. 11.

or is a deeper sense of obligation to God likely to produce in any mind a less disposition to fulfil his will? Surely its proper tendency is the very reverse of this, even to foster in us every holy disposition towards both God and man.

Towards God—a sense of our entire dependence on his sovereign will, and of our obligation to his sovereign grace, will excite a feeling of gratitude, such as Paul speaks of, when he says, “The love of Christ constraineth me.” “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits?” is the question which every one will ask, when once he sees, that “not according to any works of righteousness which we have done, but of his own mercy God has saved us^s.” If once we have a good hope, that we are of “the chosen generation, and of God’s peculiar people,” we shall exert ourselves to “shew forth in every possible way the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light^t.”

Towards man also will these sentiments operate in the most favourable way that can be imagined. A sense of God’s electing love will fill us with compassion towards those who are ignorant and out of the way. We shall not, like the proud Pharisee, despise others, but pity them; we shall not say, “Stand off, I am holier than thou;” but shall bear in mind, who it is that has made us to differ even from the most abandoned of mankind^u. And, if a brother fall, we shall not exult over him, but shall endeavour rather to restore him in meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted^x.

We will readily grant that there are many truly pious, and even eminent, Christians, who do not embrace *systematically*, and *in profession*, the doctrines of predestination and election: but no pious man will ever arrogate *merit* to himself, or make himself *the first moving cause* of his own salvation. There is not a saint either in heaven or earth who will not cordially and from his inmost soul confess, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” And, if only the whole glory of our salvation be given to God alone, we are not anxious to press the matter farther, or to insist on terms which they are not willing to admit: if only from their souls they unite in the practical acknowledgment of our text, we will be content to leave the speculative points deduced from it to the judgment of the great day.]

Before we close the subject, we will yet farther notice what it contains—

1. For our instruction—

[The Apostle ascribed his privileges and attainments to

^s Tit. iii. 4, 5.

^t 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^u 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^x Gal. vi. 1.

the grace of God: "By the grace of God I am what I am." What then must they do who are yet afar off from God, and have no part with the Apostle either in his privileges or attainments? Let them seek grace from God: let them not trust in their own goodness or strength, but look simply to the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom "they may both obtain mercy, and find grace to help them in the time of need." If only they will renounce all dependence on themselves, they shall receive from the God of all grace a sufficiency for all their wants.]

2. For our encouragement—

[Who is it that utters the acknowledgment in our text? What, Saul? Saul the blasphemer; Saul the persecutor? Yes, it is even so. But tell us, Paul, what thou didst to obtain this grace? Didst thou not earn it? No. Didst thou not merit it? No. Didst thou not even seek it? No. And yet it was given thee? Yes, when I was in the very act of fighting against God with all my might. Then who shall despair? Who shall say, The grace of God can never reach me; or, if given, can never operate effectually in me? Verily, no man on this side the grave has any reason to despair. Hear what the Apostle says: he tells us that God's particular design in so converting him was, to keep all others from despair; and to make him a pattern and example of his long-suffering to all future generations^y. Hear this, ye who are ready to entertain desponding fears; and know assuredly, that God's grace is his own; that he may give it to whomsoever he will; and that there is not a creature in the universe for whom it shall not be effectual, if he will but seek it in sincerity and truth.]

^y 1 Tim. i. 16.

MDCCCXCI.

THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

1 Cor. xv. 17, 18. *If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins: then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*

THE wisest among the heathen philosophers could not speak with any certainty respecting the future existence of the soul: they could only form conjectures respecting it; so little could unassisted reason do towards the ascertaining of this most important point. As for the resurrection of the body, they

deemed it ridiculous and absurd ; and considered it as impossible that atoms, so widely dispersed and so variously combined, should ever be reduced to their original form. The Gospel, however, has brought life and immortality to light ; and assured us, not only that every soul shall exist in a future world, but that the bodies of men also shall rise out of their graves, and be re-united each to that very soul that once inhabited it. Nevertheless, some, who made a profession of Christianity, were still blinded by the prejudices which they had formerly imbibed. Hence they explained the doctrine of the resurrection in a figurative manner ; and said, that it was passed already. The Apostle, therefore, set himself to counteract this dangerous delusion, by proving that there should indeed be a resurrection of the body. This he proved from what was fully believed among them, the resurrection of Christ : he shewed, that, if Christ was actually risen, there could be no reason why we should not rise in like manner ; but that, on the contrary, his resurrection was a pattern and an earnest of ours. In order to give additional weight to this argument, he proves incontestibly that Christ himself had risen ; he proves it, I say, by an appeal to numberless living witnesses who had seen him : and then he sets before them three most tremendous consequences which would follow, on a supposition that he was not risen : “ If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain ; ye are yet in your sins ; then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.” This argument of the Apostle’s being of the greatest importance, we will endeavour,

I. To confirm ;

II. To improve it.

I. To confirm his argument—It consists of three parts, which he mentions as consequences that will follow from a denial of Christ’s resurrection—

1. If Christ be not risen, *our faith is vain*—

The Christian, as long as he is in the world, is called to the exercise of faith : he walks by faith, and

not by sight : he lives upon a Saviour whom he has never seen with his bodily eyes, and receives a supply of every want out of his fulness. By faith we view Jesus as a *surety* : we consider him as having discharged our debt : this is the ground on which we hope that our sins shall never be put to our account. We believe what the Scripture says, that “ it was exacted of him and he was made answerable ;” and that his death was a sufficient compensation for the debt which we had incurred. But what proof have we that he has paid the debt, if he be not risen ? We may suppose that he undertook to pay it ; and that he laid down his life in order to pay it ; but this will by no means prove that he has fully satisfied the demands of law and justice. If a man that has become our surety remain in prison, it is a sign that he has not made good the payment which he had taken upon himself ; but if he be set free, we then conclude that the creditors have been satisfied. So, if Christ had yet been confined in the prison of the grave, we might have concluded that the debt was yet unpaid ; and consequently, our faith in him as our surety would have been vain and delusive : for, notwithstanding all which Jesus might have done for us, there would yet have remained some part of the debt to be discharged by us, and we must therefore have despaired of ever obtaining happiness in the eternal world.

Again : By faith we view Jesus as an *Advocate*. We are still offending daily in many things ; so that, notwithstanding we have been reconciled to God, we should soon provoke him to withdraw his mercy from us, and to shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure. But the Scripture says, that, “ if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” By faith, we look to him to intercede for us ; to plead our cause ; and to maintain our peace with God. But what ground have we for such a hope if Christ be not risen ? Instead of being in heaven to plead our cause, he still lies in the bowels of the earth : instead of living to promote our interests, he is no better than a senseless and inanimate

corpse. How vain therefore must be our expectations, when we indulge the thought of his prevailing intercessions! We are but buoying up ourselves with groundless hopes, and weaving a web which shall soon be swept away by the besom of destruction.

Once more:—By faith we view Jesus as a *Head* of all vital influences. The Scripture speaks of him as the vine, and us as the branches; and represents him as “Head over all things to the Church.” We look therefore to him that we may receive out of his fulness: we expect grace and peace from him to be communicated to us in the hour of need: we consider ourselves as withered branches, when separated from him, and as no longer having a capacity to bring forth any fruit than while we are united to him, and derive sap and nourishment from him. But what a delusion must this be, if Christ be not risen! If he be not risen, he is still dead: and how can that which is destitute of life impart life to us? What can we possibly receive from him if he be still imprisoned in the grave? We see, then, that whether we regard him as our Surety, our Advocate, or our Head, our faith is vain if he be not risen; yea, we are left under the most deplorable error and delusion that ever engrossed the mind of man.

The next consequence that would follow upon a denial of Christ's resurrection would be, that *we should be yet in our sins.*

It is the believer's privilege to be free from sin, and to stand in the presence of God without spot or blemish. But this removal of his sins depends upon various circumstances, which are grounded upon the resurrection of Christ.

In the first place, the removal of our sins depends on the truth of our Lord's mission: and the truth of his mission stands or falls with his resurrection. Our Lord constantly spoke of his resurrection on the third day as the grand proof which should be given of his Divine mission. Whether he spoke to friends or enemies, still this he proposed as the test whereby to try the truth of all he said; insomuch that his

enemies were peculiarly solicitous to prevent, if possible, the accomplishment of these predictions; knowing that, if they should be fulfilled, the authority of his mission would be fully established. Now let us suppose for a moment that Christ had not risen, what must we have concluded? Surely, that he was an impostor; that he had deceived his followers by specious pretences; and that, so far from being able to remove our guilt, he perished under the weight of his own most accumulated wickedness.

Again: The removal of our sins depends *on the acceptance of his sacrifice*. He offered himself as a sacrifice to God, in order that he might expiate our offences; and on the acceptance of this, our eternal happiness depends: if God receive it as an offering of a sweet-smelling savour, we may hope he will be propitious to us on account of it; but if he do not declare himself well-pleased with it, we are left altogether without a remedy. Now how shall it be known whether God has accepted it or not? If we are to judge by the circumstances of our Lord's death, we should rather conclude that the Father took no pleasure in him, since our Lord himself so bitterly complained of the dereliction which he experienced in the very hour of his extremity. We must judge therefore by his resurrection: and that this was to be the test is evident from the sacrifices which were under the law. It was not consistent with the Divine will that the beasts that were sacrificed should be restored to life; but yet this was done in a figure: for one goat was slain to expiate sin by his blood, and another goat was sent away into the wilderness, laden with the iniquities of all the people. So when birds were offered; one was slain, and another was dipped in the blood of that which was slain, and then let loose into the air. These were types of our Saviour, who was first to be slain, and then to be raised from the dead, and ascend into the highest heavens; and if he had not risen, we should have had no proof whatever that his sacrifice was accepted. Yet on the acceptance of this sacrifice the removal

of our sins entirely depended; so that if Christ be not risen, we must be yet in our sins.

Once more: The removal of our sins depends on *our Lord's execution of his office*. Our Lord undertook the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; and though he did in part fulfil these offices on earth, yet he fulfilled them only in part; the principal accomplishment of them remained to take place after he should be seated in heaven: he was *then*, as the great Prophet of the Church, to reveal the will of God more fully, and teach by his Spirit those, who, for want of a divine illumination, could not comprehend the truths he had delivered. As the great *High Priest*, he was to enter within the veil: it was not sufficient that the high priest offered the sacrifice on the day of atonement; he was also to carry the blood into the holy of holies, to sprinkle it on the mercy-seat, to offer incense, and then to come out and bless the people. So, our Lord was under a necessity of rising again, that he might enter into heaven with his own blood, that he might there present it before the mercy-seat; and that, after offering the incense of his continual intercession, he might, in due time, come forth to bless the people. As a *King*, also, he had only as yet asserted his kingly office and authority; it was necessary therefore that he should go to the right hand of God, and there sit till all his enemies should be made his footstool. Now, if he did not rise, he cannot execute any of these offices; and yet upon the execution of them depends the removal of our sins: so then, if he be not risen, we are yet in our sins.

We see therefore, that, as the removal of our sins depends on *the truth of his mission, the acceptance of his sacrifice, and the execution of his offices*; and as all these depend on his resurrection, we must, if he be not risen, be yet in our sins.

A third consequence that would follow from the denial of Christ's resurrection is, that they also who *have fallen asleep in Christ are perished*. Death to the believer is only as a sleep; it has lost its sting:

and as he commends himself to the Divine protection when he lies down upon his bed, so he commits his departing spirit into his Saviour's hands, and falls asleep in Christ; and while his body lies mouldering in the dust, his soul is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom: but if Christ be not risen, all who from the beginning of the world have fallen asleep in Christ have perished: either their souls have been annihilated at their separation from the body; or rather they have become the monuments of God's wrath and indignation.

For, in the first place, *all that have fallen asleep in Christ, have, on a supposition that Christ is not risen, built their hopes on a sandy foundation.* They have relied wholly on the merit of Christ's blood, and expected justification only through his obedience unto death: and, as they have trusted in his righteousness, so have they gloried in his strength; not going forth against any enemy, but in his name, and in reliance upon his grace: nor have they trusted in any thing but in his continual intercession for maintaining their peace with God. In short, they have made Christ their only foundation, on whom they have built all their hopes. Now if Christ be not risen, that foundation has failed them, and consequently all the superstructure must fall to the ground: so that, notwithstanding all their affiance in him, they are perished; yea, though they committed their departing spirits into his hands, they were not saved: for he could not help them; he could not hear their prayer: in trusting to him they trusted only to a broken reed, which now pierces them through with unutterable and everlasting anguish.

Again: If Christ be not risen, they are perished; *because, however zealous they were of good works, their works were not sufficient to justify them before God.* We cannot indeed conceive more eminent piety than Abraham discovered in leaving his country and sacrificing his own son; or than David manifested in his incessant praises and thanksgivings; or than Stephen

shewed when laying down his life for Christ, and praying for his murderers. And yet behold what the text asserts ; " they all are perished if Christ be not risen." The reason is plain : they were transgressors of God's law ; as transgressors, they were subject to the curse and condemnation of the law ; nor could any thing less than an infinitely valuable atonement remove that curse. In vain they prayed ; in vain they strove ; in vain they endeavoured to do the will of God ; in vain they laid down their lives for his sake ; they were under the curse ; and cursed they must be, if Christ did not become their Saviour. But he could not become a Saviour to them if he did not rise ; and therefore, if he be not risen, they are all, without exception, perished. They are perished ; first, because their foundation failed them ; and next, because, *that* having failed, no hope remained to them from any thing which they themselves could do. It is now plain, I trust, that the consequences which the Apostle states as following a denial of our Lord's resurrection are true, and that his argument is strictly just. Having therefore confirmed his argument, we proceed,

II. To improve it—

It will be to little purpose to know the force of the Apostle's reasoning, unless we deduce from it those practical inferences which may bring it home to our hearts and consciences.

First, then, We may see from hence *how ignorant they are that seek salvation by works!*

The generality of mankind are hoping to be saved for something which they have done, or something which they intend to do : indeed even those who have lived in all manner of evil tempers and sensual indulgences are yet often so blind, as to be the most strenuous in contending for the merit of good works, and in crying out against those who speak of salvation by faith. But do these people fancy themselves wiser and better than all the saints of old ? Will any one

say that Stephen was not an eminently pious man? Was he not chosen out by the people, because he was full of faith and the Holy Ghost? Was he not endued with peculiar gifts, insomuch that his adversaries could not resist the spirit and wisdom with which he spake? Did he not also manifest a peculiar excellence of disposition? Did he not with all fidelity charge the people's sins upon them? and, when they were in the very act of stoning him, did he not, after the example of our Lord, pray for his murderers? Did he not willingly seal the truth with his blood? Was he not so highly honoured of God that his face was made to shine like the face of an angel? and was he not, even while in the body, favoured with a sight of God, and of Christ, as standing at the right hand of God? Say now, Where shall we find a man that bids more fair to be saved by his works than he? yet *was* he saved by his works? or *could* he be saved by his works? No. Notwithstanding all his works, he needed the blood of Christ to cleanse him from sin: he needed Christ, as his Advocate and Strength, his Saviour and his all; and if Christ be not in a capacity to save him, he is perished. Nor have his works availed him any thing more than to lessen in some degree the condemnation he would otherwise have endured. Who then art thou that seekest to be justified by thy works? Art thou as eminent as Stephen? if not, how canst thou hope to be saved, when even he, if he had no better ground of confidence than his own works, must have perished? Or suppose that thou wert as good as he, still thou must meet with the same fate; thou must perish, and that eternally, if thou rely on any thing but a crucified and exalted Saviour. Oh, then, blush at your ignorance, ye proud, self-justifying sinners! See how Satan has blinded your eyes! See how far ye are from the way of salvation! Oh, let me beseech you for Christ's sake, and for your soul's sake, to renounce all your self-righteous hopes and endeavours, and to rely on him who alone can save you, and who is able to save you to the uttermost.

Secondly. We may see from hence *how miserable is the state of unbelievers!*

By unbelievers, we mean, not only those who deliberately reject Christ, but all who do not actually enjoy an interest in him. Now these persons, whatever they may think of themselves, and however they may bless themselves because of the abundance of earthly things which they possess, are in as miserable a state as can well be conceived: for, as they have no interest in Christ, it is eventually the same to them as if he had never risen; only with this difference, that their guilt is much greater by neglecting the Saviour, than it could have been without such an aggravation. What then is their state? precisely that mentioned in the text; "their faith, as far as they have any, is all vain:" even though they assent to all which is spoken concerning Christ, 'tis all in vain: "They are yet in their sins;" all the load of their iniquities lies upon them, and the curse of God hangeth over their devoted head. They will also "perish" whenever they die; there cannot possibly be any admission for them into heaven: perish they must; and remain for ever the monuments of God's displeasure. And now say, is not this a miserable state? What though a man have a large estate, can that make him happy? What though he have a form of godliness, can that make him happy? No: he must have an interest in Christ, or he will be a poor miserable wretch for ever. Oh! my brethren, seek an interest in this risen Saviour: think of him, not only as dying for your offences, but as risen again for your justification: and be assured, that, as you shall be reconciled to God by the death of his Son, so, much more, being reconciled, you shall be saved by his life. Do not conclude too hastily that you have an interest in the Saviour: see whether you are "risen with him through a faith of the operation of God?" and never rest till you can say, "I know in whom I have believed."

Lastly. We see from hence *how happy is the state of true believers!* The resurrection of Christ, which

is the foundation of all their hopes, is proved beyond a possibility of doubt : the very means taken to conceal it are among the most convincing proofs of its reality. On the very same basis, your hopes are founded : he has said, " Because I live, ye shall live also." Think then with yourselves, that at this moment, your faith, so far from being in vain, avails for all the purposes for which it is exercised : it secures your interest in Christ as your Surety, Advocate, and Head ; and brings in an abundance of all spiritual blessings to your soul. Instead of being in your sins, they are put away from you as far as the east is from the west ; nor shall they evermore be remembered against you. God has already said concerning every such soul, as he did concerning Joshua ; " Take away the filthy garments from him : behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." Further—When you die, you will not perish with the ungodly world, but will go to take possession of a " kingdom." You will have a crown of glory on your head, and a golden harp in your hand : you will be seated on your Saviour's throne ; and shall sing his praises for evermore. Happy soul ! " what manner of love is this wherewith the Father hath loved thee ! " Hail, thou that art highly favoured of the Lord ! Rejoice, rejoice, thou servant of the Most High God ! Thy Saviour, possessed of all power in heaven and in earth, watches over thee continually : he gives his angels charge over thee : he gives thee every thing that is for thy good : and though perhaps he deals with thee not exactly as thou mightest wish, he is daily preparing thee for glory, and making thee meet for thine inheritance. Oh, then, love and serve this risen Saviour ; and set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Let it be your endeavour to keep your conversation in heaven : and while you are living upon the Saviour's fulness, oh, strive to live to the glory of his name. Thus will you adorn your holy profession ; and when he shall come again to receive you to himself, he will welcome

you with these delightful words, "Come, thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for thee, from the foundation of the world!"

MDCCCCXCII.

ADAM A TYPE OF CHRIST.

1 Cor. xv. 22. *As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

THE fall of man in Adam, and his recovery in Christ, comprehend the whole circle of Divine truth: every part of the revealed will of God is so connected with these two doctrines, that all must stand or fall together. Our death implies the former of them; and our resurrection the latter. Hence St. Paul, proving the doctrine of the resurrection, adverts to our fall in Adam as an acknowledged truth, and draws a parallel between that and our recovery in Christ.

We shall,

I. Establish the points mentioned in the text—

Nothing can be more certain than that "in Adam all died"—

[The penalty of eating the forbidden fruit was death, death temporal, spiritual, eternal: and, on the very day that Adam fell, the threatened punishment was inflicted on him, so far, at least, as could consist with God's purposes towards the world at large: the seeds of death were implanted in his body; a spiritual death seized upon his soul; and everlasting death awaited him, unless divine mercy should interpose to deliver him from it. Nor was this a matter which concerned him alone; it involved both him and all his posterity, insomuch that all the human race fell in him, and became obnoxious to temporal, spiritual, eternal death. The very words of the text prove this; yea, they prove it more strongly than any mere assertion could do; because they state it as an allowed fact; and make it the foundation of a most important comparison. And we see it plainly before our eyes. We see that all in successive generations are swept away by death. And as to spiritual death, who does not see how awfully the whole world is "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, and because of the hardness of their hearts?" As

to the eternal death, we see it not: but if we believe the word of God, we can have no doubt, but that thousands are descending daily into those dread abodes, where not so much as one ray of hope can ever enter.]

Nor is it less clear that “in Christ shall all be made alive”—

[Christ was sent into the world to repair the ruins of the fall. By his Spirit he “ quickens the souls that were dead in trespasses and sins;” and by his obedience unto death he reconciles them to their offended God. This also is as visible as the former. Look around and see whether some be not endued with a new and heavenly life, whereby they are enabled to live wholly unto God — — — It is true, that the death of the body is still inflicted upon all: but this ceases to be a punishment to God’s people, and must rather be considered as a blessing: “ To whomsoever it is Christ to live, it is *gain* to die^a,” and the body which is consigned for a while to its native dust, shall at last be raised again “ in the likeness of Christ’s glorious body,” to participate the blessedness of its kindred soul. All this, I say, is restored to us in and through Christ, who on this very account calls himself “ the resurrection and the life^b.”]

But both these points will be yet further confirmed, while we,

II. Shew the correspondence between them—

If it be asked, *How* did we die in Adam? and, *How* do we live in Christ? we answer;

1. By means of a federal relation to them—

[Neither Adam nor Christ are to be regarded as private individuals, but as the representatives of all mankind. Adam was the covenant head of the whole world: the covenant was made with him for himself and them: had he fulfilled the conditions imposed upon him, there is reason to believe, that the benefits of his obedience would have descended to his latest posterity. For beyond a doubt they are involved in the punishment of his disobedience, and consequently, we may infer that they would have been comprehended in the recompence of his obedience. The death of infants is a decisive evidence, that the sin of Adam is imputed to them; for death is the punishment of sin; and a righteous God will not inflict punishment, where it is not in some way or other merited; therefore they, who have never committed actual sin, and yet are punished, must have guilt imputed to them in some other

^a Phil. i. 21.

^b John xi. 25.

way, or, in other words, must be chargeable with Adam's guilt. This is the Apostle's own statement; and his conclusion is irresistible^c.

Christ in the same manner was the head and representative of the elect world: what he did and suffered, he did and suffered in our place and stead; "he, who knew no sin, became sin for us, that we, who had no righteousness, might become the righteousness of God in him^d." St. Paul himself not only asserts this, but draws at considerable length this very parallel between Adam and Christ, in order to evince, that, so far from being injured by this constitution of things, we have our loss in Adam far overbalanced by the remedy which God has given us in Christ^e.]

2. By the communication of their nature to us—

[Adam was formed after God's image, pure and holy; but he begat children in his own fallen image, corrupt and sinful^f. Nor could he do otherwise; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean^g?" The fountain being polluted, the streams that issued from it could not but participate of its malignant qualities. Hence it is that we are conceived in sin and born in iniquity^h; and that all, the Apostles themselves not excepted, "are by nature children of wrathⁱ."

Thus Christ also imparts his nature to those whom he has chosen to share his benefits. He makes them "partakers of a divine nature^k," and transforms them into "the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness^l:" "He himself lives in them^m;" and thus renders them meet for eternal life, even for the inheritance of the saints in lightⁿ.

It is, however, proper to observe, that though *all* are said to die in Adam, and to be made alive in Christ, the benefits received from Christ do not extend to all that are affected by Adam's fall; the word "*all*" must, in the latter clause, be taken in a more limited sense, and import that, as they, who were represented by Adam, and are partakers of *his* nature, die in him; so they, who were represented by Christ, and are partakers of *his* nature, shall live in him.]

INFER—

1. How much of Christ may be seen even in the character of Adam himself!—

[Adam is expressly said to be "a *figure* of him that was to

^c Rom. v. 12, 14.

^d 2 Cor. v. 21.

^e Rom. v. 15—21.

^f Gen. i. 26, 27. and v. 3.

^g Job xiv. 4.

^h Ps. li. 5.

ⁱ Eph. ii. 3.

^k 2 Pet. i. 4.

^l Eph. iv. 24.

^m Gal. ii. 20.

ⁿ Col. i. 12.

come^o;" and Christ, in reference to him, is called the second Adam^p. Both of them were the representatives of their respective seeds; but, blessed be God! not with the same success: the one destroyed, the other saves, the souls committed to him. Let us then renounce, as far as possible, our connexion with him who has brought condemnation upon us, and seek an union with him, "through whose obedience we may be made righteous."]

2. Of what importance is it to understand and receive the Gospel!—

[It is only by the Gospel that we can be acquainted with the work of Christ, and obtain an interest in him: if we know *him* not, we remain under all the disadvantages of the fall. It is this Gospel which gives to the least and meanest of us so great an advantage over all the philosophers of Greece and Rome. They saw in what a fallen state the world was: but how it became so, or how it could be remedied, they had no conception. We however know both the one and the other: we know that in Adam we died, and that in Christ we all may be made alive. True, this does not accord well with the dictates of corrupt reason. But to dispute about this doctrine is to no purpose: we are dead in Adam, whether we will believe it or not; nor can we obtain life, but in and through Christ. Let us then not reject the gracious overtures of Christ, but turn to him in this our time of acceptance, this day of our salvation.]

3. How thankful should we be for God's distinguishing mercy to the sinners of mankind!—

[When angels fell, there was no Saviour provided for them: they were punished for the first offence, and will remain monuments of God's indignation to all eternity: but *we* are spared, yea, are saved by the mediation of God's co-equal Son^q. Let heaven and earth praise him! and let every tongue *now*, as surely we shall hereafter, adore him for such unmerited, incomprehensible love!]

^o Rom. v. 14. The Greek. ^p 1 Cor. xv. 45—47. ^q Heb. ii. 16.

MDCCCCXCIII.

DYING DAILY.

1 Cor. xv. 31. *I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*

THERE were many in the apostolic age who denied the resurrection of the dead^a. St. Paul, in

^a ver. 12.

opposition to them, maintained the truth of that doctrine. In confirmation of his word, he asserted that he himself, no less than the other Apostles, had seen the Lord Jesus Christ in his risen state; and that, consequently, there must be a resurrection of the dead; more especially because the Lord Jesus did not rise as a mere individual, but as the head and forerunner of his people, even as the first-fruits before the harvest. He then appeals to his adversaries themselves, whether, upon any other hypothesis than that of a resurrection to a future life of blessedness and glory, it would be possible to account for the conduct of himself and all his fellow Apostles and fellow Christians; all of whom so readily encountered the severest trials that men could endure in this world, in the hope and prospect of approving themselves to God, and of being approved by Him in the day of judgment? "What shall they do who are baptized for the dead," that is, in the room of the dead, like soldiers filling up the ranks of those who have been cut off, if the "dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead? and why stand we in jeopardy every hour?" Then, for their conviction, he protests most solemnly before God, that this was his own experience, and that "he died daily."

In considering these words, I will notice,

I. The Apostle's experience—

He here declares the daily habit of his mind,

1. As the fruit and consequence of the persecutions he suffered—

[The Apostle preached the Gospel "with great plainness of speech." By this he gave offence to multitudes, both of Jews and Gentiles, who with implacable animosity sought his life. He had not preached the Gospel many days before his enemies conspired to destroy him; and necessitated him, for the preservation of his life, to be let down in a basket from the battlements of a walled city. From that time he was in continual danger, never knowing but that the address he was delivering would prove his last. Truly, he was "in deaths oft^b;" and "like a sheep appointed for the slaughter^c;" or

^b 2 Cor. xi. 23.

^c Rom. viii. 36.

like the gladiators, who were to engage in renewed combats till they died^d. In truth, he was regarded only as "the filth of the world, and as the off-scouring of all things;" fit only to be sacrificed for the pacifying of a dæmon, or for the removal of a common plague^e. Thus "he was in jeopardy every hour of his life^f;" and, as he expresses it in my text, "he died daily."]

2. As wrought and cherished in his own soul—

[It is plain that this also is included in the expression before us; and that it forms, in fact, the very jet of his argument. 'I protest,' says he 'that, as I am daily exposed to death for my ministrations, so I willingly submit to it in an assured prospect that I shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.' He knew that, independently of his persecutions, his life was very uncertain, and that he could not call a day or an hour his own: and the murderous cruelty of his enemies rendered his continuance in life still more precarious. But he was willing to die at any time, and in any way, for his Master's sake^g: yea, "he desired to depart, and to be with Christ, as far better" than any thing he could attain in this life^h; and he accounted every moment of his continuance in the body as a privation of blessedness in the immediate presence of his Lordⁱ. He knew, that, at the very instant of his departure from the body, he should "behold his Lord face to face^k;" and, that, at the day of judgment, his body also should be raised to "meet the Lord in the air, and to be for ever with the Lord^l:" and, under this conviction, he looked upon martyrdom itself as a ground of cordial self-congratulation and joy^m.]

This subject derives peculiar importance from,

II. The solemn manner in which he affirmed it—

He takes for granted that those, whom he addressed, rejoiced in Christ Jesus, even as he did: and he protests by their rejoicing, as well as by *his own*ⁿ, that this was indeed his experience from day to day. And from this protest we learn,

1. That this experience is not common—

[No, in truth: it is very rare even among "those who

^d 1 Cor. iv. 9.

^e 1 Cor. iv. 13.

^f ver. 30.

^g Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

^h Phil. i. 23.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 6—8.

^k 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^l 1 Thess. iv. 17.

^m Phil. ii. 17, 18.

ⁿ I think the marginal translation of "our" instead of "your," decidedly preferable.

profess godliness." That there is no such persecution now, as existed in the apostolic age, is certain; and, consequently, the preachers of the Gospel exercise not their ministry so much at the peril of their life: but there is as much need of zeal now as ever: and the servants of God are as much bound to be faithful in the discharge of their duty as ever; and they must be as ready to sacrifice their lives in the cause of their Divine Master as ever. There is to be no difference in these respects between the Apostles and us. If not called to endure the same trials as they, we must be willing to endure them, if called to it: and if we love our lives in comparison of Him and his glory, we shall lose our souls for ever.

As to looking forward to a longer stay on earth, we are no more entitled to indulge such a conceit than the Apostles were; for "we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth." And it is our privilege to be anticipating the blessedness of heaven as much as it was theirs. We should count death amongst our treasures: and be "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ," quite as much as they did in their devoutest frames — — —

But is this a *common* attainment? Would to God it were! But the generality of Christians put the day far from them, as though it were to be dreaded, rather than desired: and even the more godly amongst us live far below their privileges in this respect.]

2. That, however, it ought to be found in all who believe in Christ—

[He takes for granted, that all true Christians "rejoice in Christ." And truly this is a distinctive character of them: and the man who has not in himself this evidence of his relation to Christ, has no sufficient reason to think that he belongs to Christ°. But, supposing that we are really Christ's, then should the Apostle's experience be ours: and so palpably should it be ours, that we should be able to join in the asseveration of St. Paul, and say, "I protest, by my rejoicing in Christ, and as I hope to rejoice in him in a better world, I am dying daily:" "I am crucified to the world," and to all things in it: and I am, in the constant habit of my mind, like a dying man, expecting and preparing for my speedy dissolution, and anticipating with joy the blessedness that awaits me.' Beloved brethren, if ye be Christians indeed, this is the experience which you are to aspire after; this is the experience which ye are bound to attain.]

3. That the existence of this, in the Lord's people,

° Phil. iii. 3.

is a strong presumptive proof of a future resurrection—

[A few enthusiasts may be supposed to be carried forward to strange excesses of zeal, even in a bad cause. But to act and suffer as the Apostles did, could not be general amongst pious Christians, if they were not animated by a hope beyond the grave: and their conduct in this world, if it prove not the certainty of a future resurrection, proves, beyond a doubt, the full persuasion of their minds respecting it. In truth, nothing but this expectation could carry persons on to such high attainments: and, on the other hand, there is nothing which those who are persuaded of it will not gladly do and suffer in the prospect of such happiness and glory.]

Certify then yourselves, brethren, that there is indeed a future state; and labour, by the conformity of your lives to that of the holy Apostle, to shew that you are borne up, by the hope of it, far above all that the world can give, and above all that the most inveterate enemy can inflict.]

TELL me now, whether the Christian be not,

1. A happy man?—

[As “rejoicing in Christ,” he must of necessity be happy. Nor is he less so in his superiority to all the things of time and sense. In truth, the only way to live happily is to “die daily.” Be it so: he is an object of hatred and persecution amongst men: but he is beloved of God, and enjoys God; and is even led to anticipate more the blessedness of heaven by the very sufferings which he endures on earth. “When God therefore gives him such quietness, who can make trouble?” Verily “none can harm him, seeing that he is thus a follower of that which is good.”]

2. A man worthy to be imitated by all around him?—

[The poor, wretched, ignorant world run from vanity to vanity in pursuit of pleasure; and never find it. The Christian follows after righteousness; and happiness waits on him, even as the shadow of his body. To him every thing is a source of good: adversity itself comes to him as a blessing in disguise; and in his afflictions he tastes nothing but love. Seek then, my brethren, to rejoice in Christ; and then shall all the Christian’s blessedness be yours.]

MDCCCCXCIV.

THE SHAMEFULNESS OF BEING IGNORANT OF GOD.

1 Cor. xv. 34. *Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.*

KNOWLEDGE is the foundation of all acceptable obedience. We must know whom we are to serve; and why we are to serve him; and what are the services that he requires at our hands. Hence the Scriptures represent us first as “renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created us^a.” On the other hand, ignorance is the root of all sin. It was to this, as its proper source, that our Saviour and his Apostles traced the wickedness of the Jews in crucifying the Lord of glory, and in persecuting his followers^b. To this also St. Paul referred the conduct of those at Corinth who taught, that “there was no resurrection of the dead.” From their erroneous views of this fundamental doctrine, and the consequent sinfulness of their conduct, he was sure that they were ignorant of God himself; and therefore he declared it to their shame.

The same may be said in reference to ourselves, if we err in any other fundamental point of faith or practice. In order therefore to bring it home to ourselves, we shall shew,

I. What is that knowledge of God, which, as Christians, we are supposed to possess—

God has revealed himself to us in his blessed word; and we ought to know him,

1. In his essential perfections—

[These perfections he proclaimed by an audible voice to Moses, in answer to that prayer of his highly favoured servant, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory^c.” The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty^d.” Yet it is

^a Col. iii. 10.

^b John xvi. 3. Acts iii. 17. 1 Cor. ii. 8.

^c Exod. xxxiii. 18.

^d Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

not merely a speculative knowledge of him that we ought to possess, but such a knowledge as produces suitable emotions in our minds. The devils could say to our Saviour, "We know thee who thou art:" and in like manner they are acquainted with all the perfections of Jehovah; but their knowledge is unattended with any sanctifying influence: they know God, but they cannot love him; they see his holiness, and hate it; his justice, and tremble at it; his power, and lament it; his mercy, and despair of it; his grace, and oppose it; his wisdom, and endeavour to counteract it. But this view of him must fill us with wonder, and love, and gratitude, and affiance — — —]

2. As reconciled to us in the Son of his love—

[This more particularly characterizes us as Christians, because in this view he is fully exhibited to us in the Gospel. It is our happy privilege not only to have "the day-star from on high risen upon us," but to have God himself "shining into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." In the cross of Christ we should see all the perfections of God united, and harmonizing, and glorified; or, as the Psalmist expresses it, we should see "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissing each other^e." We should realize every perfection of the Deity in this view: we should see his wisdom as providing a plan for the redemption of a ruined world, and as opening a way for the exercise of mercy, without infringing upon the rights of justice, or holiness, or truth. We should see even justice itself become our friend, and beaming upon us with the same benignity as love or mercy, seeing that its utmost demands have been satisfied in the atonement of Christ, and all the glory of heaven has been purchased for us by his obedience unto death — — — In a word, the language of David should be the language of our hearts: "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light^f."]

Such is the knowledge of God which every Christian ought to possess. I proceed to shew,

II. Why it is a shame not to possess it—

^e Ps. lxxxv. 10.

^f Ps. xxxvi. 5—9.

Of many things we may all be ignorant without any imputation on our character. But to be destitute of the knowledge of God is a shame to all, because it is,

1. The most excellent of all knowledge—

[The knowledge of philosophy is a very valuable acquisition: but it is not to be compared with the knowledge of God, since *that* infinitely surpasses every thing that can occupy the human mind. How glorious is it for a worm of the earth to see the perfections of the invisible God! to behold them all shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ! and, above all, to see them all interested in his salvation! How glorious is it for a helpless sinner to know that he has omnipotence for his support, and unbounded mercy for his refuge! How glorious is it for such an unworthy creature to survey the justice and holiness, the power and wisdom, the love and mercy, the truth and faithfulness of God, and then to say, “This God is *my* God for ever and ever^g!” Surely every thing else in comparison of this is lighter than vanity itself. And whoever seeks any other knowledge in preference to this, has reason to blush for his stupidity, and to be ashamed of his choice.]

2. The most needful of all knowledge—

[The knowledge of trade, and of politics, is necessary for the welfare of a state: but a statesman need not be conversant with the lowest branches of trade; nor need a tradesman know how to govern a state. But the knowledge of God is every man’s business; it is that for which God has brought him into existence, and for which the ordinances of the Gospel are continued to him. Every man is more interested in this, than even in providing bread for his body: for he may have food supplied to him by the benevolence of others; but who can supply the lack of this knowledge, or what substitute can be found for it? Without *that* a man can have no *happiness*; because, till he has it, he is exposed to the wrath of Almighty God. Without *that* he can have no *holiness*; because holiness is the fruit that springs from it, and therefore cannot subsist without it. Without *that* he can have no *salvation*; for “to know God and Christ is eternal life^h”; and when Christ shall come to judgment, it will be for the express purpose of “taking vengeance on them that know not Godⁱ.” If then it be a shame to be destitute of all good, and to be a miserable outcast from heaven, it is a shame to be ignorant of God.]

3. The most easy to be obtained of all knowledge—

^g Ps. xlviii. 14.

^h John xvii. 3.

ⁱ 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

[There are many things which men have not a capacity to learn. But even the weakest of men may attain the knowledge of God, if they will seek it in God's appointed way. Our Lord returns thanks to his heavenly Father on this very account, "because the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent, are revealed unto babes^k." Nor is this expression merely figurative; for Samuel, Josiah, Timothy, and John, are standing monuments to the Church, that "God will ordain strength in the mouths of babes and sucklings^l." In reference to this knowledge then, no man has any excuse for his ignorance; no man can say, "I am no scholar, and therefore have no reason to be ashamed;" for all *may* know the Lord, if they will seek the enlightening influences of his Spirit, since God has pledged himself, that "if *any* man lack wisdom, and ask it of him, he will give it liberally, and without upbraiding^m."]]

APPLICATION—

[Let *those who know not God* as reconciled to them in Christ Jesus, begin to seek that knowledge without delay. And let *those who do know him*, give God the glory: for though an ignorance of him is to *our shame*, the *honour* arising from this distinction, belongs to *God alone*; since it is "*he who has given us an understanding to know himⁿ*."]]

^k Matt. xi. 25.^l Ps. viii. 2. with Matt. xxi. 16.^m Jam. i. 5.ⁿ 1 John v. 20.

MDCCCCXCV.

DEATH A CONQUERED ENEMY.

1 Cor. xv. 51—58. *Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

THE doctrine of the resurrection was altogether unknown to the heathen world, and but imperfectly known even to the Jews themselves. The idea of bodies, once mouldered into dust and scattered over the face of the earth, being ever restored, and reunited to their kindred souls, appeared so visionary, as to be wholly inadmissible and incredible. But St. Paul shews, that the resurrection of our blessed Lord was a fact established beyond the possibility of doubt; and that he had risen "as the first-fruits," which would assuredly be followed by an universal harvest^a. True it was that a great change would take place in the body, such as was necessary to fit it for its future state of existence: but still it would be the same body in reality, just as the wheat, which, when sown in the ground, first dies, and then rises substantially the same, though in a very different form^b. To the question, What shall be done with those who shall be living upon the earth at the last day? He answers, That they shall undergo a change equivalent to death and resurrection: and the manner in which this shall be effected he represents as a mystery, which in former ages had been wholly unknown, but which from inspiration he was now enabled to proclaim. However death had seemed hitherto to triumph over the many successive generations that had existed upon earth, there should at last be an end of his reign, and he himself should be triumphed over by all who belong to Christ.

That we may all have a fuller view of this mystery, we will endeavour to shew,

I. The victory that awaits the Christian—

Christians, like others, appear to be overcome by death—

[They, as well as others, yield to the stroke of death. Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, all have died: two only of all the children of men have been exempted from the common lot: and the time is quickly coming when every one of us must die; (for "the body is dead because of sin^c;") and must "return to the dust" from whence we sprang^d.]

^a ver. 20, 23. ^b ver. 35—38. ^c Rom. viii. 10. ^d Gen. iii. 19.

But in due time they shall assuredly triumph over it—

[It is the body only that death can reach: it cannot affect the believer's soul: and it is for a time only that it can affect the body. When once the last day shall arrive, there will be an end of that empire which death has so widely extended. The bodies of the saints, of whom alone the Apostle here speaks, shall then be raised up, and with varied degrees of splendour shine forth anew^e. They were sown in corruption, weakness, and dishonour, and they shall be raised in incorruption, power, and glory: from natural bodies, they shall be transformed to spiritual^f, each one shining forth, as our Saviour himself at his transfiguration, like the sun in the firmament for ever and ever^g. Thenceforth shall "death have no more dominion over them," any more than it has over our Lord himself^h: on the contrary, it shall itself "be swallowed up in victory," as the prophet has saidⁱ, and, as the Apostle elsewhere speaks, "Mortality shall be swallowed up of life^k."

By those also who shall be living at the time of our Lord's advent, shall the same triumph be enjoyed. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye shall they be changed, as soon as ever the last trump shall sound:" as, in the case of those who have died, "corruptible shall put on incorruption," so, in those who shall be found alive, "their mortal shall put on immortality^l," and "their vile body shall in an instant be made like unto Christ's glorious body^m," even to that very body in which he now sits enthroned in glory, the blessed object of adoration to all the hosts of heaven.]

That the Christian may be encouraged the more confidently to look forward to that victory, we proceed to shew,

II. How it is, that he is assured of it—

It is sin that gives death its power—

[If sin had never entered into the world, death would never have existed, or would have been only a translation from earth to heaven. This is plainly told us by St. Paul; "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, even upon those who have not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgressionⁿ." The law which passed the sentence of death on Adam^o, still says to every

^e ver. 41.

^f ver. 42—44.

^g Compare Matt. xiii. 43. with xvii. 2.

^h Rom. vi. 9. with Rev. xxi. 4.

ⁱ Isai. xxv. 8.

^k 2 Cor. v. 4. ^l ver. 52, 53.

^m Phil. iii. 21.

ⁿ Rom. v. 12, 14. with ver. 21, 22.

^o Gen. ii. 17.

child of man, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And this law cannot be set aside: it is as immutable as God himself: and hence it is that sin is itself so powerful, and invests death also with such power over our fallen race.]

But the Lord Jesus Christ has taken away our sin—

[He has put himself in our place and stead, and, as our Surety, has satisfied all the demands of the law. Did the law require the death of the offender? He has put himself in the place of sinners, and has borne the penalty for them. Would sin yet prevail to destroy the soul? He has expiated its guilt, and put "away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Must every one have a perfect righteousness before he can appear in the presence of a holy God? Christ has not only "made an end of sin, but by his obedience unto death has brought in an everlasting righteousness^p," which "he imputes to all them that believe^q." Thus is death disarmed of its sting: for sin, which was its sting, is cancelled; and the law, from which sin derived its strength, is fulfilled: and the sentence denounced against us is reversed, so far at least as it is penal; insomuch that "God may now be just, and yet the justifier of sinful men^r."]]

Thus is death disarmed of its power—

[Death, no longer envenomed by sin, is to be regarded only as a sleep, "a falling asleep in Jesus." This "enemy," this "king of terrors," is turned into a friend, and may now be numbered amongst the richest treasures of the Christian^s. If we view it aright, it is only a friend who *comes to draw aside the veil that hides the Saviour and all his glory from our eyes*. What a blessed thought! O Christian, what joy should this thought impart unto thy soul! with what transport shouldest thou exclaim, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Come forward, Christian; put thy foot upon the neck of this conquered enemy: exult over him, as God himself instructs thee, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Where are now thy boasted triumphs? Instead of swallowing up me, thou shalt be swallowed up; and instead of casting me into the lake of fire, thou thyself shalt have that for thine only and unchangeable abode^t.]

Such is the victory that awaits thee. Think then,

III. What exertions the prospect of it should call forth—

^p Dan. ix. 24.

^q Rom. iii. 22.

^r Rom. iii. 26.

^s 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^t Rev. xx. 14.

Let the expectation of this triumph stimulate thee to prepare for it. Prepare for it by,

1. A steadfast adherence to the faith—

[Much will thy faith be tried: temptations from without and from within will assuredly assault thee: perhaps even the glorious truths contained in our text may be wrested from thee by thy great adversary, so that thou shalt be led to question the reality of them, or thine interest in them. But “be steadfast, and immoveable;” “holding fast the profession of thy faith without wavering.” “Fight the good fight of faith:” “quit thyself like a man:” whoever would “move thee from the hope of the Gospel,” withstand him: whoever would turn thee aside from the right path, or discourage thee in running thy heavenly race, regard him not; but “run on with patience, looking unto Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of thy faith.”]

2. A diligent performance of thy duty—

[The Lord has given thee a work to do: O engage in it with all thy heart. Has he assigned thee any office whereby thou mayest be useful in advancing his kingdom in the world? “Give thyself wholly to it.” Do the interests of thine own soul call for thine attention? “Forget all that is behind, and press forward for that which is before.” Be not content with small measures of service; but seek to “abound in the work of the Lord;” and *this*, not on some particular occasions only, but “always,” from day to day, and from year to year, “never being weary in well-doing,” but exerting yourselves the more, in proportion as your time for performing it is cut short. Think what is that work where you may best serve and glorify your Lord; and “make it your meat and drink to do it:” yea, “what-ever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.”]

3. An assured expectation of thy reward—

[Moses himself “looked to the recompence of the reward,” as did also the martyrs of old, who “refused to accept deliverance from their tortures, that they might obtain a better resurrection.” If you had no prospect of future happiness, there would be some reason for that Epicurean maxim, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” But when you consider how short your present trials are, and how rich will be the recompence for all your labours, it were madness to draw back. Look at those who have already entered into their rest, and ask, Whether they repent of their former labours: or look at the glory that awaits thee, and then think whether the possession of it will not richly compensate all that thou canst do or suffer for thy Lord. “The Lord is not unrighteous, that he will forget your works and labours of love:” No: he

has said, that "you shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the dead;" and he will with his own hand bestow the recompence: "nor shall even a cup of cold water given for his sake lose its reward."]

ADDRESS—

[Happy should we be, if death had this aspect upon all, and we had no occasion to change our voice in relation to it. But to the ungodly it is still an enemy: and over the unbelieving it will retain its dominion to all eternity. Yes, brethren; if we have not sought refuge in Christ from the curses of the broken law, we are yet in our sins, and must perish under the guilt of them for evermore. Is this your case? how terrible then must the thought of death be to you! To you, it will be as the opening of the prison doors to a criminal, that he may be led forth to execution. For a season indeed, your body shall sleep in the dust: but in what image shall it rise in the last day? What will be its feelings, when it shall be re-occupied by the soul, that now claims it as the partner of its former sins, and of all its future sorrows! How glad would it be, if it could take its position under rocks and mountains! Even now, the thought of death is terrible to the unbelieving soul, and the contemplation of eternity distressing. But let it not be always thus; let what you have heard of the Christian's privileges stir you up to seek a participation of them. Remember, how it is that death must be disarmed of its sting: it is altogether by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as having fulfilled the law for you, and taken away your sins by the blood of his cross. Only look to him as dying for your sins, and rising again for your justification, and all shall yet be well: your souls shall live before him; "because he liveth, you shall live also:" and when he who is your life shall appear, "ye also shall appear with him in glory."

But to those who profess to believe in Christ, we would also suggest a salutary caution. If the prospect of a glorious resurrection produce not its due effect upon you, you have reason to doubt whether you have indeed an inheritance beyond the grave. It is only in proportion as your faith is operative, that you can have any evidence of its being the "faith of God's elect." And how painful will it be, when on the verge of eternity, to have your soul harassed with doubts and fears about your eternal state! Do not, I beseech you, walk so carelessly as to endanger your final acceptance with God, or to make it doubtful to your own mind. What can be the effect of sin, but to fill your dying pillow with thorns? Never then trifle either with sin or duty: let the one be put away from you with all care, and the other be practised with all diligence: and seek of God the aid of his good Spirit, that you may so

live as to enjoy the testimony of your own conscience, and so walk, "that you may be found of him in peace without spot and blameless."]

MDCCCCXCVI.

CHRISTIAN COUNSEL.

1 Cor. xvi. 13, 14. *Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity.*

OF all the apostolic Churches, not any one seems to have been so corrupt as that at Corinth: at least, St. Paul reproves more evils there than in any other. In this epistle to that Church he addresses himself to the consideration of several abuses which had crept in among them: and now, in the close of it, he gives them, in few words, his pastoral advice; but evidently, I think, with a special view to all his preceding remarks. They were in the midst of manifold temptations; and therefore he bids them "watch." They had amongst them false teachers, who, under a specious garb of sanctity and superior illumination, sought to turn them from the truth; and therefore he tells them to "stand fast in the faith." They had trials of various kinds to encounter; and therefore he says to them, "Quit you like men, be strong." At the same time, there were great contentions among them; and therefore he adds, "Let all your things be done with charity." Now, as these subjects are worthy of universal concern, we will adopt the same line of instruction as was pursued by him; and, just changing the words, in order to convey more clearly what I conceive to be the meaning of them, I will say,

I. Guard against temptations of every kind—

[Of course, every Christian must watch against all the more open assaults of his three great enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil: and I must therefore, in the first place, put you on your guard against them — — — But, as the caution was given to persons who might be considered as on the whole pious, it may be proper rather to advert to such

temptations as are peculiar to Christians, whether in their collective capacity as a Church, or in their personal experience as saints.

Now Christians, as collected into a society, have many things in their temper and deportment against which it becomes them to guard with all vigilance. Pride, envy, prejudice, uncharitableness, are very apt to disturb the harmony of those who ought to be united in the bonds of brotherly love: and they should be checked, by all, in their very first risings in the soul: and not only in ourselves should we watch against them, but in others also, so as to arrest their progress before they have had an opportunity of spreading to any great extent their malignant influence; ever bearing in mind, that "a little leaven, if suffered to spread, will soon leaven the whole lump."

Against secret evils, too, must every one be on his guard; yea, and against the means and occasions of evil. There are many things that, when kept under proper restrictions, are innocent; which yet, through unwatchfulness or excess, are productive of great evil. The exercises of Christian affection may degenerate into feelings of a very unhallowed character; and lawful indulgences may gain an undue ascendant over the mind. It is not easy to draw the precise line between good and evil, especially when the quality of an action depends on its accidental circumstances: we should therefore scrupulously, and as before God, examine our whole deportment, and try it with severity by the test of his holy law. And against *every* deviation from right, and *every* declension from what is good, we should guard with the utmost vigilance; well knowing, that Satan will take advantage of our unwatchfulness, to ensnare and defile our souls.]

As materially assistant to you in the discharge of that first duty, I would say,

II. Hold fast your principles—

[It is by the adoption of Christian principles that any one is brought to the performance of Christian duties: and any dereliction of the one will infallibly introduce a relaxation of the other. God himself asks, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" The high standard of Christian morals and of Christian piety is observed by no other person under heaven. Nothing but love to the Saviour ever did, or ever can, lead to an entire surrender of the soul to God. But let a person be drawn aside by vain philosophy or Jewish superstition, and he will soon lose the ardour of his soul in divine exercises, and the

^a 1 John v. 5.

delight attendant on close intercourse with God; and a correspondent change in the whole tone and temper of his mind will soon follow. In proportion as the eyes are turned from the Lord Jesus Christ to any matters of doubtful disputation, will a stop be put to a progressive transformation of the soul into his blessed image^b. To every one, therefore, I would say, "Hold fast the Head," the Lord Jesus Christ, and "live entirely by faith on him;" "receiving continually, out of his fulness," additional supplies of grace. And this is the very advice which St. Peter, by his own bitter experience, learned to give to the Christian Church, as the only effectual means of overcoming their great adversary: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; *whom resist, steadfast in the faith*."]

In this course, however, you will meet with opposition; against which you must,

III. Act with courage—

["All who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." You may "watch" as much as you please, and yet suffer no persecution, provided you will relax, as it respects your giving honour to Christ: or you may exalt Christ as much as you please, provided you will relax in your watchfulness against the evils of an ensnaring world: but if you will "live godly in Christ Jesus," giving all the glory to him, whilst you are serving him with fidelity to the utmost of your power, you will be sure to offend the lovers of the world, and the haters of Christ: and you may assuredly expect to feel, in a greater or less degree, the effects of their enmity. But whether assaulted by ridicule or menace, you must be alike prepared to act a manly part, withstanding every effort that men or devils can make against you. You are not, as children, to be either allured or awed to a deviation from any thing which your better judgment directs. As "men," you should examine well whatever is proposed to you, and compare it with the word of God: and, as "men," you should determine for yourselves, and resolutely adopt the line of conduct which the word of God prescribes. If "men" in the service of an earthly monarch meet with opposition, they consider it as an occasion for summing and putting forth all their energies with augmented zeal: and this is the way in which you are to "play the man^d," and to approve yourselves to Him, under whose banners you are called to fight.]

And, in this resolute conduct, you must,

^b 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^c 1 Pet. v. 8, 9.

^d ἀνὴρ ἐκείσθαι.

IV. Persevere with constancy—

[This I conceive to be the precise distinction which the Apostle intends between those nearly parallel expressions, “Quit yourselves like men; be strong^e.” We are not to suppose that the opposition made to us will be of short continuance. We shall experience it more or less to the very end of life; and we must be prepared to meet it in its most terrific forms. Never are we to give way to fear or discouragement: never are we to “be weary or faint in our minds.” No past trials, no impending calamities, should dishearten us. We should be prepared to say, as well in the prospect of future evils as in the remembrance of past, “None of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but finish my course with joy.” When we read the long catalogue of sufferings which the Apostle underwent, we are amazed at his fortitude and perseverance^f. But the same firmness is required of us: for “if any man turn back, my soul,” says God, “shall have no pleasure in him.” It is “he only who endures unto the end, that shall be eventually and eternally saved.” “Be strong,” therefore; and especially “be strong, *not in yourselves*, but in the Lord, and in the power of his might:” and you need not fear but that “his grace shall be sufficient for you,” and “your strength be augmented according to your day” of trial.]

But,

V. Let all be done under the influence of love—

[Christians are very prone to err in relation to this matter: they are ready to think, that zeal and courage constitute the whole of their duty; and, in consequence of this mistake, they too frequently overlook the frame of their own minds, and indulge, without being aware of it, a spirit most offensive to God. Acrimony in opponents often begets a similar disposition in those who are opposed: and it may be hard to say, who are most in error, the bitter persecutors, or the indignant sufferers. Beloved brethren, I wish you to be particularly on your guard in relation to this matter. You are to “be gentle to all men; and, in meekness, to instruct them that oppose themselves^g,” “not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but, contrariwise, blessing.” Our blessed Lord, and the first martyr, St. Stephen, prayed for their murderers, at the very moment that they were suffering all imaginable cruelties at their hands: and this is what you are to do; as our Lord has said; “Love your enemies: bless them that curse you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.” To young

^e κραταιοῦσθε.

^f 2 Cor. xi. 23—28.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

persons, in particular, I would give this caution. You will probably find your greatest enemies amongst those of your own household: and as you must, of necessity, “obey God rather than man,” you will be called to shew your fidelity to God in this respect: but do not, under the idea of quitting yourselves “like men,” indulge a petulant and unbecoming spirit: (persons, so acting, “know not what spirit they are of.”) Nor are you to indulge a querulous spirit behind the backs of your enemies; but to take up your cross meekly, and to bear it patiently, and to bless God that you are counted worthy to bear it for Jesus’ sake. Remember, that “love is the very bond of perfectness;” and that “without it, though you give your body to be burned, you are no better than sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.”]

MDCCCCXCVII.

THE GUILT AND DANGER OF NOT LOVING CHRIST.

1 Cor. xvi. 22. *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha.*

EVERY religion has some characteristic mark whereby it may be distinguished from all others. The leading feature of Christianity is, that it requires a resolute adherence, and an inviolable attachment to Jesus Christ. Though it includes both morality and a regard to God, it does not stop there; but leads us to Jesus Christ as the only mediator through whom divine blessings can flow down to us, or our services go up with acceptance before God. Whatever difference may exist between Christians with respect to other points, all are agreed in love to Christ. St. Paul did not hesitate to denounce the severest curse against all who should be wanting in this most essential point. He had finished this epistle by the hand of an amanuensis, and was going, as his manner was in every epistle, to write his benediction with his own hand; but deeply solicitous for the welfare of the Church, as well as for the glory of his Divine Master, he inserted between his salutation and his benediction these ever memorable words;—“If any

man," &c. These are in the form of a judicial sentence, which we shall,

I. Explain—

The solemnity with which this sentence is delivered surely bespeaks our most candid attention: but how shall we, in drawing the line between nominal and real Christians, speak with such precision, as neither to discourage the weak, nor to confirm hypocrites or formalists in their delusions? Let us explain,

1. What it is to love the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Love, whatever be its object, implies such an esteem of that object, such a desire after it, and such a delight in it, as the object itself deserves. What would be an idolatrous fondness when placed on one object, would fall very far short of the affection that might be justly claimed by another. Now Christ being incomparably more worthy of our love than any created being, our love to him ought to be unrivalled and supreme. To compliment him with honourable titles, while we feel no real regard for him in our souls, is no better than an impious mockery. We must entertain high and exalted thoughts of him as the Saviour of the world; and have learned with Paul to "count all things but dross and dung in comparison of him" — — — We must also feel such need of him in his mediatorial office and character, as to say with David, "My soul longeth for thee even as the hart panteth for the water-brooks;" "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee" — — — Our fellowship with him, moreover, must be sweet: nor must we find less pleasure in doing his will than in enjoying his presence — — — This is the criterion whereby he himself has taught us to judge of our love to him^a.]

2. What is the judgment denounced against those who are destitute of this love?—

["Anathema" is a term often used to signify only an ecclesiastical censure, or an excommunication from the Church; but the addition of the word "Maran-atha" necessitates us to understand it in reference to the judgment at the last day. Under the Jewish law there were many crimes that were to be punished with death; and, when a person was convicted of one of these, he was executed according to the divine command: but when the Jews were brought into subjection to the Romans, they lost the power of life and death^b: when there-

^a John xiv. 21. and xv. 14.

^b John xviii. 31.

fore a person committed any crime, that would have been punished with death by the Jewish law, the Jews excommunicated the offender, and expected that God would visit him in some signal manner; or at least inflict an adequate punishment upon him at the last day. In reference to this, it should seem the Apostle used the word "*Maran-atha*," which in the Syriac language means, "*The Lord cometh*." The import therefore of the denunciation in the text is, That, as they, who did not love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, deserved to be blotted out of the list of true Christians, and to be punished with everlasting destruction, so there was no doubt but that, although *man* could not take cognizance of that offence, *God* would; and execute signal vengeance on all those who should live and die under the guilt of it.]

Severe as this sentence is, it is such as we may undertake to,

II. Vindicate—

It may not be improper first to vindicate *the Apostle himself*—

[To consign to everlasting destruction those who are free from any gross sin, and who perhaps abound in "the form of religion, while they are only destitute of its power," may seem harsh; but we shall in vain attempt to put any milder interpretation on the words of the text. Shall we then censure the Apostle as uncharitable and severe? If we do, we must involve all the other inspired writers and Christ himself in the same censure. Moses, by God's command, denounced similar vengeance on persons of various descriptions, and required the people to confirm his word by an express declaration of their own consent and approbation^c. Jeremiah and Malachi repeatedly spake to the same effect^d. Nor was this peculiar to those who lived under the legal dispensation: St. Paul repeatedly denounced a curse even against any angel from heaven that should presume to publish any other Gospel than that which he had preached^e. Yea, the meek and compassionate Jesus declared, that God would be a father to none who did not love him^f; and that he himself would in the last day summon before him all that had refused his yoke, and order them to be slain without mercy^g. Such examples as these may well screen the Apostle from any imputation of needless severity.]

Next we will vindicate *the sentence he denounced*—

^c Deut. xxvii. 15—26, *twelve* times.

^d Jer. xi. 3. and xvii. 5. and xlviii. 10. Mal. i. 14.

^e Gal. i. 8, 9.

^f John viii. 42.

^g Luke xix. 27.

Awful as it is, it will appear both just and reasonable, if we only consider the exceeding sinfulness of not loving the Lord Jesus. This sin implies,

1. Rebellion against the highest authority—

[God has by an audible voice from heaven commanded us to “hear” his Son, that is, to regard him with attention, love, and obedience. He has enjoined all the great and noble of the earth to “kiss the Son” in token of their affection and homage^h. He has required all men to honour the Son even as they honour the Fatherⁱ. And are we at liberty to set at naught this authority? Do we feel indignant, if our child or our servant refuse obedience to our just commands, and shall not the Most High God express his indignation against us for resisting and despising the most reasonable command that could possibly be given us? If man forbear to notice this iniquity, shall God also? shall he give us reason for that atheistical reflection, “Thou God wilt not regard it?”]

2. A contempt of the highest excellency—

[In the Lord Jesus Christ is every possible excellency combined. Whether we view him in his divine, his human, or his mediatorial character, he is “altogether lovely.” There is nothing wanting in him which can in any way conduce to the glory of God or the good of men. What shall we say then of those who love not such a glorious Being? Surely they pour contempt upon him. This is the construction which God himself puts upon their conduct; “Him that honoureth me, I will honour; but he that *despiseth* me, shall be lightly esteemed^k.” And is not this a sin of the deepest die? to despise him who is the fountain of all excellency! to despise him whom all the angels adore! What must not such iniquity as this deserve? Surely to be despised and abhorred of him is the least that such offenders can expect.]

3. Ingratitude towards the greatest Benefactor—

[Can we reflect a moment on what Christ has done and suffered for us, and not stand amazed that there should be a creature upon earth that does not love him? Can we contemplate his mysterious incarnation, his laborious life, his painful death, his continual intercession, and all the other wonders of his love, and feel no emotions of gratitude towards him? Or shall ingratitude to earthly benefactors be deemed the greatest possible aggravation of a fault, and shall such horrid ingratitude of ours be thought light and venial? No; it stamps an inexpressible baseness on our character; nor

^h Ps. ii. 12.

ⁱ John v. 23.

^k 1 Sam. ii. 30.

can any punishment short of that denounced in the text, be adequate to such impiety.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us seriously examine into the evidences of our love to Christ; that if he should ask us, as he did Peter, “Lovest thou me?” we may be able to reply with him, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.” Let us tremble at the thought of subjecting ourselves to the judgments here denounced, and instead of presuming to speak against them as too severe, let us make it our constant endeavour to escape them. So shall death and judgment be divested of all their terrors; and Christ, whom we love, be the eternal portion of our souls.]

2 CORINTHIANS.

MDCCCCXCVIII.

THE TRIALS AND CONSOLATIONS OF MINISTERS USEFUL TO
THEIR PEOPLE.

2 Cor. i. 3, 4. *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort, wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

THE former Epistle to the Corinthians abounded with reproofs, for which indeed there was in that Church but too much occasion. This epistle is altogether of a different kind, and contains a rich fund of paternal and most affectionate instruction. In the opening of it, St. Paul quite forgets all the pain and sorrow which they had occasioned him, and blesses God for the consolations he enjoyed, especially in the view of those blessed effects which had been produced upon their minds by his former letter^a. How “full of comfort” he was, we may judge from the frequent repetition of the word “comfort;” he knew not how to leave the subject, or to vary his expression: his whole soul appears to have been swallowed up in the contemplation of the comfort which he had received from God, and which he hoped to be the means of communicating to them also.

That we may enter into the spirit of his words, let us notice—

^a 1 Cor. vii. 4—7.

I. His representation of the Deity—

In the Old Testament, Jehovah was known as “the God of Abraham;” but in the New Testament, he is exhibited under a yet more endearing character, as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” Observe here,

1. His relation to Christ—

[There is in the Godhead a distinction between the Three Persons of the ever-blessed Trinity; the first Person is called the Father; the second Person, the Son; and the third Person is called the Holy Ghost. The Son is said to be “the only-begotten of the Father:” but of this inscrutable mystery it were in vain to speak, since we should only “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” It is sufficient for us to know, that such a distinction in the Godhead does exist, and that, in this sense, God was, from all eternity, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Of the manhood of Christ, formed as it was by Omnipotence without the intervention of man, God may in a more definite sense be said to have been the Father: and in reference to this, his miraculous conception in a virgin’s womb, Jesus was especially designated “the Son of God^b.”

In his mediatorial capacity also, as “Emmanuel, God with us,” our Lord Jesus Christ stands in covenant relation to God, as a Son to a Father; agreeably to what he himself says, “I ascend unto my Father and your Father, to my God and your God^c.”

Now, as all the children of Israel claimed a special interest in Jehovah as being the seed of Abraham whose God he was, so we, who look to Jesus as our common Head and Saviour, are entitled to consider *his* God as *our* God, since we are in him as members of his mystical body, and are altogether “one spirit with him.” And, as Jesus is infinitely greater in himself, and more dear to God, than ever Abraham was, our interest in God, by virtue of our union with Jesus, is proportionably greater and more endeared.]

2. His relation to us—

[To us, who are involved in the deepest guilt and misery, he is revealed as “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” What remarkable expressions are these! There is not a mercy which we enjoy, but it must be traced to him as its proper source; nor is there a mercy which we want, but it

^b Luke i. 35.

^c John xx. 17. Acts xiii. 33.

may be found in him to the utmost extent of our necessities. Nothing but mercy properly flows from him: "judgment is his strange act," which is never called forth, till mercy has been as it were exhausted. Judgments are his *servants*; but mercies are his *children*, in whom is all his delight^d. As for comfort, he is the God of it, "the God of all comfort." Were his will complied with, there would be nothing but comfort in the whole universe: it would flow from him as light from the sun; so free, so rich, so abundant would be his communications of it to every soul. Let the afflicted, of every name and every class, only go to him, and he will approve himself "the comforter of all them that are cast down," and "the God of that particular comfort" which they need; as if all his perfections and all his powers centered in that point alone, and were exerted to their utmost extent for the relief of their particular wants.

Such is the view which we should at all times have of the Deity. If we regard him only as a Lawgiver and a Judge, we have no better apprehensions of him than Satan himself has. It is our privilege to know him, not merely in the terrors of his majesty, but in all the endearments of his love and mercy.]

With this beautiful description of the Deity the Apostle combines,

II. His thanksgiving to him—

Great and manifold were the tribulations which he was called to sustain—

[The whole world, both of Jews and Gentiles, seemed to be confederate against him. Every man, with the exception of those who were converted by his ministry, was his enemy, and sought his destruction; insomuch that he was in daily, and hourly, expectation of a violent death^e. From the Church itself too he endured much. The false brethren, who laboured incessantly to undermine his influence, and to create dissensions in the Church, were a source of continual sorrow to his mind. Nor was he free from internal trials also, which caused him great uneasiness. What "the thorn in his flesh" was, we do not exactly know: but he regarded it as a "messenger of Satan, sent to buffet him;" nor could he find any relief from the anguish it occasioned, till he was assured, in answer to his repeated and earnest cries, "that a sufficiency of grace" should be imparted to him, and that "Christ's strength should be perfected in his weakness."

Not that these trials were peculiar to him: he felt them

^d Mic. vii. 18.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 30, 31.

indeed in a more abundant measure than others; but every faithful minister in his measure experiences the same. Who that is zealous for his God does not incur the hatred of an ungodly world? Who that has long ministered in holy things has not had occasion to deplore the fall of some, the apostasy of others, and the little progress of almost all; insomuch that with many he is made to “travail, as it were, in birth a second time, till Christ be formed in them?” Some perhaps, who would once have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him, are now “become his enemies, because he has told them the truth,” and reproved them for their reigning and besetting sins. And in himself also every minister will find abundant occasion to sigh and mourn, especially when he reflects on his great insufficiency for the work assigned him, and the effects of his unprofitableness upon the souls of others.]

But he had rich consolations to counterbalance his afflictions—

[It was no small comfort to the Apostle that his trials were endured in so good a cause. The cross he bore was the cause of Christ; and his afflictions were but the filling up of the measure of Christ’s afflictions^f. Moreover they were so many testimonies to him of his fidelity; and of God’s acceptance of him in his work^g. He was sure also that in due time they would all be richly recompensed, agreeably to that blessed promise, that “if we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him,” and “be glorified together with him” for evermore^h. But besides these consolations of faith and hope, he had, as every faithful minister shall have, special manifestations of God to his soul, sufficient to make him “exceeding joyful in all his tribulations.” What but a sense of redeeming love carried him forward with such zeal and steadfastness in all his course? What but this enabled him, when his back was torn with scourges, and his feet were made fast in the stocks, to fill his prison, not with mournings and complaints, but with songs of praise and thanksgiving? And in like manner shall all who serve the Lord with fidelity be supported under their trials, and be favoured with consolations proportioned to their afflictions.]

To enter into his feelings aright, it will be proper to notice yet further—

III. The more particular grounds of his thanksgiving—

^f Col. i. 24.

^g Luke xxi. 12, 13.

^h 2 Tim. ii. 12. Rom. viii. 17.

The design of God in these dispensations was in a more especial manner an occasion of gratitude to his soul. He felt that by this his diversified experience, he was better fitted for the discharge of his high office, and better qualified to comfort his afflicted brethren. By it,

1. He was better qualified to comfort others—

[None but those who have been in deep waters are capable of entering into the feelings of a tempest-tossed soul. It was from his “having been in all points tempted like as we are, that Jesus himself was so tenderly touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and that he acquired, so to speak, “a power to succour his tempted peopleⁱ.” Thus Paul learned to participate with others both in their joys and sorrows. Were they assaulted either by men or devils, he knew both the extent of the trial, and the consolations proper to be suggested for the mitigation of it. He could delineate the workings of the afflicted mind: he could state its various discouragements, and the devices by which Satan laboured to aggravate its sorrows. He needed only to report his own experience, and to apply to others the remedies he had found effectual for his own soul. In a word, the lessons which he himself had learned in the school of adversity, he was enabled to teach others, and thus eventually to “comfort others with the same comfort wherewith he himself had been comforted of God.”

Now this very consideration constituted no small part of that comfort for which he so gratefully adored his God. He saw that, whether he was afflicted or comforted, his experience was designed to promote, and did actually promote, “the consolation and salvation of others^k,” and there he did rejoice, and determined, even though his trials should proceed to the utmost possible extremity, to rejoice, and to bless and magnify his God^l.

In this view will every faithful minister rejoice, thankful alike either for joys or sorrows, if only they may fit him for a more profitable exercise of his ministry, and ultimately advance that for which alone he deserves to live, the consolation and salvation of those committed to his charge.]

2. He was made to edify others by his example—

[The supports which Paul experienced under his accumulated trials, were a source of great encouragement to others. His imprisonment at Rome, which he was apprehensive might intimidate many, and impede the success of his ministry,

ⁱ Heb. ii. 18. and iv. 15.

^k ver. 6.

^l Phil. ii. 17, 18.

“turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel: for his bonds in Christ being manifest in all the imperial palace, and in all other places, many of his brethren, waxing confident by his bonds, were so much the more bold to speak the word without fear^m.” Thus, though he was bound, “the word of God was not bound;” on the contrary, “it had free course and was glorified:” and the tidings which he received respecting the steadfastness of his converts, far overbalanced all his pains and sorrows. Hear how he speaks of this in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians: “When Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, we were comforted over you, brethren, in all our affliction and distress by your faith: for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lordⁿ.”

And who that loves his people will not gladly lead them in the van of the battle, if he may but encourage them to “fight the good fight of faith?” Surely no good soldier of Jesus Christ will regret the wounds he receives in this holy conflict, if others be animated by his example to “quit themselves like men” till they have gained the victory.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are afraid of suffering for Christ’s sake—

[Let it not be thought that the cross of Christ is so heavy as it appears to be. Were we indeed left to bear it alone, or were there no consolations afforded by him to his suffering people, we might well be terrified at the idea of being called to sustain it. But the Lord himself will lighten it by his almighty power, and will succour us with such preternatural strength, that, instead of sinking under the weight, we shall rejoice that we are counted worthy to bear it, and shall account our very sufferings an inestimable gift bestowed upon us for his sake^o. And if *here* we are enabled so to “glory in the cross of Christ,” what shall we do *hereafter*? Do any of those who once “came out of great tribulation,” now regret any thing that they ever endured for Christ’s sake? Are not their present joys an abundant recompence for all their sorrows^p? ——— Fear not then to follow Christ, though you should have to take up the heaviest cross that can be laid upon you: for, if you will but bear it after him, you shall find that “his yoke is easy, and his burthen light.”]

2. Those who have experienced the consolations of the Gospel—

^m Phil. i. 12—14.

^o Phil. i. 29.

ⁿ 1 Thess. iii. 6—8.

^p Rev. vii. 13—17.

[Make the improvement of them which the Apostle did; *Bless God for them; and improve them for the good of others.* Have you by your own experience found God to be “a Father of mercies, and a God of all comfort?” acknowledge him under this blessed character, and commend him to all for the instruction and comfort of their souls. Your consolations are not given you for yourselves merely, but for others also; that you may be channels of communication between God and them. Many there are who need your friendly offices; many with weak “hands, and feeble knees, and fearful hearts,” whom, with God’s blessing, you may support and comfort. O remember, that it is a god-like office to “comfort them that are cast down,” “to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness!” And in thus improving your diversified experiences, you will enrich both yourselves and others: I may add too, you will have the best evidence, that they are wrought in you by the Spirit of God: for it is in this improvement of them that “pure and undefiled religion” very principally consists^a. You may be assured also, that, in thus drawing out your *soul* to the hungry, and satisfying the afflicted *soul*, “your own souls shall become like a watered garden, and like springs of water, whose waters fail not^r.”]

^a Jam. i. 27.

^r Isai. lviii. 10, 11. If this be addressed to a *Visiting Society*, this idea must be more fully insisted on.

MDCCCCXCIX.

THE TESTIMONY OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

2 Cor. i. 12. *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world.*

GREATLY as the Apostle merited the admiration of all, there was not any thing which he did that was not made an occasion of complaint against him. His enemies at Corinth were numerous and powerful: and so grievous had been their influence in producing divisions and contentions amongst his converts, that he was constrained to menace them with a speedy visit, in case his remonstrances with them should not be duly regarded^a. Had he proceeded

^a 1 Cor. iv. 18—21.

thither immediately, they would have represented him as a man, who could not endure the least contradiction, but tyrannized over his followers in a most despotic manner: but when a few months elapsed without their seeing him, they spoke of him as a weak man, who did not know his own mind, or dared not to execute his own purpose. But against these accusations he answered, that the delay of his journey had been not at all owing to any versatility of mind in him, but partly to outward impediments which he could not easily have removed, and partly to the unwillingness he had felt to exercise the severity which their misconduct called for^b. Under all their misrepresentations, however, he had felt much peace of mind: because he had the testimony of his own conscience, that, in his ministrations in general, and in his whole conduct towards them in particular, he had acted to God, without any corrupt bias whatsoever. This he asserts in our text; from whence we shall take occasion to shew,

I. Of what kind our conversation in the world should be—

That our *actions* should be consonant with all the strictest rules of morality, is a truth so obvious, that we need not at present insist upon it. It is not so much of actions, as of *principles*, that we are now called to speak. The Christian should have respect to God in all that he does, and should approve himself to God,

1. In his ends and designs—

[There should be no leaning to self in any thing that we do; no view to the advancement of our own interest, or reputation, or influence, but a single desire to do only what we verily believe to be the will of God, and what shall most conduce to his glory. This principle is to be carried into every thing, the most minute, as well as the most important: “Whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God^c.” By this the Apostle had regulated his conduct towards the Corinthian Church. Whether he had exercised authority or forbearance, he had had this only in view;

^b ver. 8, 23.

^c 1 Cor. x. 31.

And we in like manner, whether we proceed in an uniform tenour, or diversify our conduct according to existing circumstances, should exclude every other consideration from our minds: "we should choose only the things that will please^d" and glorify our God.]

2. In the means by which he prosecutes his ends—

[Here the utmost simplicity of mind should always prevail. We should not listen to the dictates of "fleshly wisdom," but with "godly sincerity" proceed in a plain straight-forward way. Not that we are to discard human wisdom: for we are told to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without." But, though we are to be "wise concerning that which is good, we are to be simple concerning evil^e," and are to combine the "wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove^f." In no respect are we ever "to do evil that good may come." Here, however, many fail. On two different occasions do we find even Abraham himself grievously erring in this particular, and reprov'd for it by a heathen prince^g. And Isaac also was faulty in the very same thing, denying his wife, lest for her sake he should be put to death^h. It was to the same weakness that we must ascribe the conduct of Peter, when, through fear of Judaizing teachers, he constrained the Gentiles to conform to the Jewish rites. He thought he should in that way remove a stumbling-block from the Jews: and so far he was right, in wishing to remove a stumbling-block out of their way; but he was wrong in the means he adopted for that end: he knew that the Gentiles were not bound by the Jewish law; and therefore he had no right to impose this yoke upon them: and he was justly blamed by Paul as "not walking uprightly" in this particularⁱ. Whatever be our end, we must do nothing to accomplish it which will not bear the light, and stand the test of the severest scrutiny. We must act simply under the influence of "the grace of God," and never in a way of carnal policy. Our ends, and our means, must be alike regulated by the word of God, and alike conducive to the glory of his name.

Such then is to be our conversation in the world; it must not only be moral, but religious, having respect in all things to God's word as the rule, and his honour as the end; whilst all selfish ends and human policy must be utterly discarded.]

But as internal principles are difficult to be discerned, we proceed to shew,

^d Isai. lvi. 4.

^e Rom. xvi. 19.

^f Matt. x. 16.

^g Gen. xii. 13, 18, 19. and xx. 2, 5, 9, 10. ^h Gen. xxvi. 7—10.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 11—14.

II. What evidence we should have, that it is such as God requires—

Men can judge only of acts, and can ascertain principles no farther than they are illustrated by the outward fruits produced by them. The inward motives and dispositions of the mind can be discerned only by ourselves, and by God, who searcheth the heart. Nor can they be discovered even by ourselves without great care and watchfulness. We are very apt to mistake our own motives and principles, just as the Disciples did, when they would have called fire from heaven to consume a Samaritan village: “they knew not what spirit they were of.” But we ought not to be so deceived respecting our conversation:

We ought to have “the testimony of our conscience” respecting it—

[We should have a consciousness, that we do indeed desire to do the will of God, and that we would not willingly either go beyond it, or fall short of it, in any thing. We should be able to make the same appeal to our God and Saviour as Peter did, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest, that I love thee,” and that I am seeking nothing but the glory of thy name: ‘thou knowest that, in order to find out thy will, I study thy blessed word, and seek instruction from thy good Spirit, and commit my ways to thy guidance: thou knowest that, though I often have doubts and misgivings whether I do really adopt the most perfect line of conduct, I do not intentionally deviate from any thing which I believe to be pleasing and acceptable to thee. I can appeal to thee, that I do continually exercise myself to keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and man.’]

Such a testimony may be enjoyed by every one of us—

[It is not the result of pride, as some would imagine; but the voice of God’s blessed “Spirit bearing witness with our spirits.” When Job was accused of harbouring some hidden iniquity, which had brought down such signal judgments upon him, he made his appeal to God in these energetic terms, “Thou knowest that I am not wicked^k.” The Apostle Paul frequently appealed in like manner to the heart-searching God. In the very chapter before us he says, “I call God for a record

^k Job x. 7.

upon my soul, that, to spare you, I came not as yet unto Corinth^l." But in the Epistle to the Romans we have a more remarkable instance. It was supposed by the Jews, that the Apostle's love to the Gentiles necessarily argued a want of love towards his brethren of the Jewish nation: and he, in order to silence for ever such an accusation, says, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren^m." What forbids then that we should have the same testimony respecting our principles, and that we should be able to make the same appeal to Almighty God? If we have really walked as before him, we "have the same witness of it in ourselvesⁿ," and may say with Job, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps: his way have I kept, and not declined^o."]

Blessed is that man who has such an evidence within him! but no words can adequately describe,

III. The comfort which such a testimony will produce—

It was a matter of no small comfort to the Apostle that he had this testimony. And to every one who possesses it, it is a solid ground of joy and triumph^p. It is of unspeakable comfort,

1. Under the reproaches and calumnies of men—

[The servants of God will always be hated and calumniated by an ungodly world: and, generally speaking, the more zealous they are in the discharge of their duty, the more virulent will be the opposition made to them. We have seen already the construction which the Apostle's enemies at Corinth put on the delay of his journey thither: and in other parts of this epistle we are told, that he was represented by them as "walking after the flesh^q," and as "craftily endeavouring to catch men with guile^r." And it is highly probable that those who did not understand the principles on which he acted, would speak of him as the most changeable and inconsistent of men; sometimes observing days and ceremonies, and at other times violently opposing the observance of them. But he cared little for their censures, when he had the testimony of his own conscience that he was acting right. Thus it is that pious characters are judged at this day. People are glad

^l ver. 23.

^m Rom. ix. 1, 2.

ⁿ 1 John v. 10.

^o Job xxiii. 10, 11. ^p *καύχησις*.

^q 2 Cor. x. 2, 3.

^r 2 Cor. xii. 16.

to find fault with them. Every thing they do is made an occasion of reproach to them. Whether they more affect the austerity of John, or the ease and familiarity of Jesus, whether they pipe or mourn, they are equally condemned^s. As for the reasons of their conduct, or the truth of the reports that are circulated respecting them, no one will take the trouble to make the least inquiry. Sometimes it happens, as in the case of Joseph, that appearances are against them, and that they have no means of clearing their own character: O what a satisfaction is it to them under such circumstances, that God knoweth their hearts, and will vindicate them in the last day from the aspersions that are cast upon them! Doubtless that pure and conscientious man had much sweeter composure of mind in prison, even whilst “the iron of the stocks entered into his soul,” than had the adulterous queen, at whose instance these pains were inflicted on him. And every man who enjoys the testimony of his own conscience, is out of the reach of those shafts by which ungodly men endeavour to wound his reputation, and destroy his peace.]

2. In the prospect of death and judgment—

[No man who knows his own sinfulness will presume to justify himself before God: but, in relation to particular accusations, or to the general desire of his soul to please God, every man, who is truly upright, may enjoy the richest consolation in the prospect of that day when the truth shall be brought to light, and every man who has served God in sincerity and truth shall have a sentence of approbation from the lips of his Judge. It was in the view of this day, that Paul made so light of the obloquy that was cast upon him^t. And in the near approach of death, Hezekiah found in the records of his own conscience a most consolatory reflection. For his country, and for the cause of God in the land, “he wept sore:” but for his own departure he had no reason to mourn^u: he had approved himself faithful in the discharge of his duty; and he had no ground to dread the judgment that would be pronounced upon him. But would the same confidence become us? Yes, in proportion as the same grounds exist for it: for “if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things: but, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God, and may assure our hearts before him^x.”]

ADVICE—

1. Seek to have your conscience duly enlightened—

[If conscience itself be not enlightened by the word and Spirit of God, its testimony will be extremely fallacious: it

^s Matt. xi. 17—19.

^t 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.

^u Isai. xxxviii. 3.

^x 1 John iii. 19—21.

may give a sentence of approbation where the severest condemnation is due^y. If not itself regulated according to the Scriptures of truth, it will be a false guide and a deceitful comforter — — —]

2. Consult it daily as in the presence of God—

[Inquire into its records of the past, and seek its direction for the future. Consult it in reference to every part of your duty, and especially in reference to the end for which you live, and the means you are using to attain it. If you will listen to its voice, it will tell you whether you are living to yourselves, or to your God; and whether you are exercising that care and watchfulness, that labour and self-denial, that zeal and love, which are necessary to bear out a testimony in your favour — — — The more diligently you consult it in your hours of leisure and retirement, especially if you take care to implore earnestly from God the influences of his Spirit, the more salutary will be its warnings, and the more consoling its testimonies in your favour.]

3. Endeavour to keep it pure—

[Excellent was that resolution of Job, “My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live^z.” True it is, that whilst you are in this ensnaring world, exposed as you are to temptations without and to corruptions within, there will be frequent occasion to lament the defilements you contract. But go from day to day, and from hour to hour, to the fountain of Christ’s blood, which is “able to cleanse you from all sin,” and “from an evil conscience.” And let not any sin, however small it may in appearance be, continue unrepented of, or unmortified — — —]

4. Aim at the highest attainments—

[It is not at a course of moral actions only that you must aim, but at a life entirely and unreservedly devoted to God. “The single eye” is that after which you must aspire; and “the simplicity that is in Christ,” is that which you must hold fast under all possible circumstances. Every action, every word, every thought, must, if possible, be under the influence of Divine grace, and be “brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Strive for this with all your might; and then we will venture to say, that in you shall that word be fulfilled; “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace^a.”]

^y Acts xxvi. 9.

^z Job xxvii. 6.

^a Ps. xxxvii. 37.

MM.

THE CHURCHMAN'S CONFESSION, OR AN APPEAL TO THE
LITURGY.

2 Cor. i. 13. *We write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge.*

AS the testimony of one's own conscience is the strongest support under false accusations, so an appeal to the consciences of others is the most effectual means of refuting the charges that are brought against us. To this species of argument God himself condescended to have recourse, in order to convince his people, that the evils which they imputed to him originated wholly in their own folly and wickedness: "O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes^a?" "Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore say my people, We are lords, we will come no more unto thee^b?" "Ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel, Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal^c?" The inspired writers also not unfrequently vindicate themselves in a similar manner. St. Paul, for instance, had been represented by some at Corinth as fickle and inconstant, because he had not come to them at the time they had expected him. To clear himself from this imputation, he informs them, that he had met with insuperable obstacles in Asia, which had prevented him from prosecuting his intended journey; and that in the whole of his conduct towards them he had been actuated, not by temporizing motives and carnal policy, but by the most strict unblemished integrity. He declares, that he had "the testimony of his own conscience" respecting this^d; and that he had a further testimony in their consciences also, respecting

^a Isai. v. 3, 4.

^b Jer. ii. 5, 31.

^c Ezek. xviii. 25.

^d 2 Cor. i. 12.

the truth of what he said; that, in asserting these things, "he wrote no other things than what they read in his former epistle, and were constrained to acknowledge; and he trusted they should acknowledge even to the end."

The faithful minister of Christ derives great advantage from being able to appeal to records, the authority of which is acknowledged by his hearers. By referring them to the Holy Scriptures in proof of all that he advances, he establishes his word upon the most unquestionable authority, and fixes conviction upon their minds. The ministers of the Church of England have yet further advantage, because, in addition to the Scriptures, they have other authorities to which they may refer in confirmation of the truths they utter. It is true, we are not to put any human compositions on a level with the inspired volume: the Scriptures alone are the proper standard of truth; but the Articles, Homilies, and Liturgy of the Church of England are an authorized exposition of the sense in which all her members profess to understand the Scriptures. To these therefore we appeal as well as to the sacred records. But because it would occupy more time than can reasonably be allowed for one discourse to appeal to all at once, we shall content ourselves with calling your attention to the Liturgy, and especially to that part of it which we call the General Confession. We will briefly state what doctrines we insist upon as necessary to be received; and under each we will compare our statements with what we "read" in the Scriptures, and "acknowledge" in our prayers: And we trust that, after having done this, we shall be able to adopt the language of the text, and say, "We write none other things unto you than what ye read, and acknowledge."

There are three things, which, as it is our duty, so also it is our continual labour, to make known; namely, *Our lost estate*—*The means of our recovery*—and *The path of duty*.

Permit me then to state what we declare respecting the first of these points, *Our lost estate*.

We declare, that every man is a sinner before God : that both the actions and the hearts of men are depraved : that whatever difference there may be between one and another with respect to open sin, there is no difference with respect to our alienation from God, or our radical aversion to his holy will. We affirm, that, on account of our defection from God, we deserve his heavy displeasure : that the most moral and sober, as well as the base and profligate, are under condemnation on account of sin : and that all of us without exception must perish, if we do not turn to God in the way that he has prescribed.

We think, yea we are sure, that we have abundant proof of these things in the Holy Scriptures. The *universality* of our departure from God, and of our danger in consequence of it, is declared in the strongest terms by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. “ There is none righteous,” says he, “ no not one : there is none that understandeth ; there is none that seeketh after God : they are all gone out of the way ; they are together become unprofitable ; there is none that doeth good, no not one.” To this he adds, “ that every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God^e.” We could wish you particularly to notice what an *accumulation of words* there is in this short passage to prove the universality of our guilt and misery. Of righteous persons, there is “ none,” “ none,” “ none,” “ no not one,” “ no not one :” “ all” are guilty, all “ together,” even “ every” person, and “ all the world.” Will any one, after reading this passage, presume to think himself an exception ?

Nor is the *depth* of our depravity less clear than its universality. “ The heart,” says Jeremiah, “ is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; Who can know it^f ?” This is spoken, not of some particular person or age or country, but of mankind at large, even of our whole race. Solomon affirms the same when he says, “ The heart of the sons of

^e Rom. iii. 10—19.

^f Jer. xvii. 9.

men is full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead^g." And to the same effect is that declaration of St. Paul, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be^h." To these general affirmations of Scripture, we may add the confessions of the most eminent saints. Job, who was the most perfect man on earth in his day, no sooner attained the knowledge of his real character, than he exclaimed, "Behold I am vileⁱ." St. Paul also, speaking of himself and of all the other Apostles, says, "We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others^k."

In labouring to establish these awful truths, we are often considered as libelling human nature, and as representing men in such an humiliating and distressed state as to fill them with melancholy, or drive them to despair. Let us then, in vindication both of ourselves and of our doctrines, compare these assertions with our public acknowledgments. We begin our Confession with saying, "*We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.*" This is a peculiar expression that must not be overlooked. We apprehend it does not mean merely that we have departed from God, but also that we have never sought to return to him: for other animals will find their way back when they have wandered from their home; but it is rarely, if ever, known that the sheep traces back its footsteps to the fold from whence it has strayed: if it return at all, it is not by any foresight of its own. How just a picture does this exhibit of our fallen race! That we have departed from God is too plain to be denied: but in how few do we behold any solicitude to return to him! How few are there who search the Scriptures daily, in order to find their way back! How few

^g Eccl. ix. 3.

^h Rom. viii. 7.

ⁱ Job xl. 4.

^k Eph. ii. 3. and Tit. iii. 3.

who implore help and direction from their God with an earnestness at all proportioned to the urgency of their case !

Is it inquired, wherein we have so greatly erred ? Our own acknowledgments contain the most satisfactory reply : “ *We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.* ” How true is this ! Look at all mankind ; see them from infancy to youth, and from youth to old age ; What are they all following ? are they obeying unreservedly the commands of God ? are they, in compliance with his will, mortifying every evil propensity, and doing the things which are pleasing in his sight ? Alas ! nothing is further from their minds than this. Their pursuits indeed vary according to their age, their circumstances, their habits ; but whatever they be, they are no other than the devices and desires of their own hearts : if in any thing they appear to do the will of God, they do not act from a principle of love to him, but from a desire to conform to the customs of their country, and to lay a foundation for self-applause. The whole tenour of our lives is but too justly marked in those following acknowledgments, “ *We have offended against thy holy laws : we have left undone those things which we ought to have done ; and have done those things which we ought not to have done.* ” Permit me to ask, which of the laws of God have we not violated times without number ? Shall we say, We have not committed murder or adultery ? How vain the boast, if we interpret the commandments in their full latitude, and call to mind the declarations of our Lord, that an angry word is murder, and a wanton look adultery¹ ! To go into all our sins of omission and commission, were an endless task. Suffice it to say, that in ten thousand instances “ we have sinned, in thought, word, and deed, against the Divine Majesty ; ” and have habitually neglected the interests of our souls.

Perhaps it may be said, “ Our actions indeed have been evil, but our hearts are good. ” But how does

¹ Matt. v. 27, 28.

this accord with that which in our confession forms the summit of the climax, "*There is no health in us ?*" Here our Church has taught us to trace all the evils of our life to the fountain-head, a corrupt and wicked heart. In this expression she evidently refers, either to that confession of the Apostle, "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing^m;" or rather to that most humiliating declaration of the prophet, "From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying soresⁿ." The import of the words is plain: we confess before our God, that we are altogether depraved; that we are disordered in every member of our body, and in every faculty of our soul; that our understanding is darkened, our will perverse, our affections sensual, our memory treacherous, our conscience seared, and all our "members instruments of unrighteousness and sin."

Thus far then we are fully vindicated, vindicated too, we trust, in your consciences, in all that we have affirmed respecting the lost estate of man. We do indeed represent the whole human race as in a most deplorable condition: but no member of our establishment can controvert our positions without denying the plainest asseverations of Holy Writ, and contradicting his own most solemn acknowledgments.

Let us now turn our attention to the second point which we proposed to notice, namely, *The means of our recovery* from this state.

We affirm that, in order to obtain salvation, two things are necessary; "Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ^o." By repentance, we do not mean that superficial work which consists in saying, 'I am sorry for what I have done;' but in such a deep sense of our guilt and danger, as leads us with all humility of mind to God, and stirs us up to a most earnest application to him for mercy. We must feel sin to be a burthen to our souls: we must be made to tremble at the wrath of God which we

^m Rom. vii. 18.

ⁿ Isai. i. 5, 6.

^o Acts xx. 21.

have merited : we must cry to him for deliverance from it, as Peter cried for preservation from the waves, “ Save, Lord, or I perish :” and this must be our experience, not merely after some flagrant transgression, or on some particular occasion, but at all times : it must be, as it were, the daily habit of our minds.

Is it needful to confirm this from the Holy Scriptures ? Surely we need not be reminded of what our Lord has repeatedly affirmed ; “ Except ye repent, ye shall all perish^p.” We need not be told that it is “ the weary and heavy laden” whom Christ invites^q : that it is “ the broken and contrite heart which God will not despise^r :” that we must “ lothe ourselves for all our abominations^s ;” that we must “ sow in tears, and go on our way weeping^t :” that we must cry with Paul, “ O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me^u ?” and with Job, “ I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes^x.”

Yet, when this is insisted on, and pressed upon the conscience as of universal, absolute, and indispensable necessity, we are told, that we carry matters to excess : that, however such bitter contrition may suit the profligate and abandoned, it is unnecessary in the case of the more moral and decent : *they* have never done any thing that requires such deep humiliation ; *they* have no such cause to fear and tremble ; *they* have indeed sinned, but are in no danger of perishing ; nor have *they* ever merited the wrath of God.

But is it not astonishing that any member of the established Church should be so ignorant as to make these vain assertions ? What are the terms in which we address the Divine Majesty every time that we attend his worship ? “ *Do thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders : Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults : Restore thou them that are penitent.*” Have we then been dissembling with God

^p Luke xiii. 3, 5.

^q Matt. xi. 28.

^r Ps. li. 17.

^s Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

^t Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

^u Rom. vii. 24.

^x Job xlii. 6.

all our days ; calling ourselves “ miserable offenders,” when we feel no misery at all ; and when, instead of bewailing our offences, we think ourselves almost, if not altogether, as good as we need to be ? In this prayer we do not presume even to expect mercy, except as persons deeply penitent and contrite. And let it be remembered, that these petitions are put into the mouths of all the congregation ; there is not one form for one class of persons, and another for another ; but all profess to approach God as the repenting publican, “ smiting upon their breasts, and crying, God be merciful to me a sinner^y !” We mean not to say, that no person can hope for mercy, who does not feel such or such a measure of contrition (for all who pray in *sincerity* may hope for acceptance, though their hearts be not so contrite as they could wish), but to shew, that all members of the Church of England acknowledge that penitence is highly suited to their state.

But, besides their repentance, we observed, that faith also was necessary, even faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This we invariably and inflexibly affirm. As it is not our good works and meritorious life that will save us, so neither will our repentance save us. If we could shed rivers of tears, they would never avail to cleanse us from one single sin. It is the blood of Christ, and that alone, that can atone for our guilt : *That* is “ the fountain that was opened for sin and for uncleanness^z :” and as long as the world shall stand, we must require of sinners to wash in it, in order that they may be clean. And, forasmuch as men are with great difficulty turned from endeavouring “ to establish their own righteousness^a,” or to unite their own fancied merits with the merits of Christ, we guard them strongly against this fatal error ; we declare to them, that, if they do this, they will invalidate the whole Gospel ; and that, if ever they be saved at all, it must be by a humble, simple reliance on the Lord Jesus Christ. That there are

^y Luke xviii. 13.

^z Zech. xiii. 1.

^a Rom. x. 3.

blessings promised to the penitent, and to the obedient, we very willingly allow : and on proper occasions we are glad to bring forward those promises, in order to encourage men to repent and obey : but that men are justified by their repentance or obedience, or in any other way than by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we utterly deny. And we declare that, if men seek to be justified in any other way, “Christ shall profit them nothing^b.”

And do we, in affirming these things, deviate at all from what we read in the Holy Scriptures ? Does not our blessed Lord expressly say, “I am the way, the truth, and the life ; no man cometh unto the Father but by me^c ?” He tells us plainly, that “he who believeth on him, hath everlasting life ; and that he who believeth not, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him^d :” and again, “He that believeth, shall be saved ; and he that believeth not, shall be damned^e.” To the same effect also is the testimony of his Apostles : we find them invariably directing penitents to believe in him as the only, and effectual, means of obtaining acceptance with God. When the jailor came in to Paul and Silas, trembling, and crying, “Sirs, what shall I do to be saved ?” the answer given him was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved^f.” Instead of varying their directions according to the different characters they addressed, they affirm, in the strongest manner, that “there is no other foundation whereon any man can build^g,” “nor any other name whereby any man can be saved^h.” And when they saw in any a disposition to unite the observance of some ceremonial or moral duties as a joint ground of their hope, they warned them plainly, that their salvation must be “wholly of grace or wholly of worksⁱ ;” and that, if they relied in any measure upon their works, “they were fallen from grace,” they were “become debtors to do the whole law,” and that “Christ was become of

^b Gal. v. 2.

^c Mark xvi. 16.

^d Acts iv. 12.

^e John xiv. 6.

^f Acts xvi. 30, 31.

^g Rom. xi. 6.

^h John iii. 36.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 11.

no effect unto them^k;" with respect to them "he was dead in vain^l."

Offensive as these statements are, and reprobated as being of a licentious tendency, wherein do they differ from our own acknowledgments? We pray that God would "restore to his favour them that are penitent;" but how, and in what manner, do we expect that restoration to be accomplished? Is it uncovenanted mercy that we ask? Or is it according to our own good works that we desire to find acceptance? No; we profess that our reliance is altogether on God's promises as they are revealed in the Gospel; "*Restore us, according to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord.*" Among the promises to which we may be supposed to refer, the following must certainly be numbered: "Look unto me, and be ye saved^m." "Come unto me, and I will give you restⁿ." "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out^o." "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin^p." "All that believe, shall be justified from all things^q." "Though your sins be as crimson, they shall be white as snow^r." But whatever the promises be, whether their reference to Christ be more or less plain, we are assured, that it is in him, and in him alone, that the promises are confirmed to us; for the Apostle says, "All the promises of God IN HIM are yea, and IN HIM amen^s." It is in Christ alone that God can "be just, and at the same time the justifier of sinners^t:" and therefore when we plead that promise, that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^u," we can expect its accomplishment in no other way than through faith in Christ.

Thus under this head also may be seen a perfect harmony between those things which we have affirmed,

^k Gal. v. 3, 4.

ⁿ Matt. xi. 28.

^q Acts xiii. 39.

^t Rom. iii. 26.

^l Gal. ii. 21.

^o John vi. 37.

^r Isai. i. 18.

^u 1 John i. 9.

^m Isai. xlv. 22.

^p 1 John i. 7.

^s 2 Cor. i. 20.

and those which you “read” in the Scriptures, and “acknowledge” in your prayers.

Nor do we doubt a similar issue to our inquiries, while, under the last head of our discourse, we state to you *The path of duty*.

We inculcate the practice of every personal and relative duty. But we are not satisfied with that standard of holiness which is current in the world: we require a higher tone of morals: in addition to sobriety and honesty, we insist upon a life entirely devoted to God: we affirm, that it is every man's duty to delight himself in God^x;” to have such a lively sense of Christ's love to him, as shall constrain him to an unreserved surrender of all his faculties and powers to the service of his Lord^y. We must live for God: we must be like a faithful servant, who inquires from day to day what his master's will is; and inquires, in order that he may do it. As a servant who had neglected all his duties through the day, would feel ashamed and afraid of his master's displeasure, so should we feel ashamed and afraid, if any day pass without having executed to the utmost of our power the duties of it. We should walk as on the confines of the eternal world, and act as persons who must shortly give account of every talent that has been committed to them. To be “dead unto the world^z,” and “alive unto God^a,” to attain more and more of the Divine image^b; to grow up into Christ in all things^c; to enjoy fellowship with God^d, and anticipate the enjoyments of heaven^e; this is our duty, and should be our daily study and delight.

In requiring so much, we are supposed to require what is altogether impracticable, or, at least, what, if practised, would unfit us for all the common offices of life. But what do we read in the Holy Scriptures? Do they require of us less than this? Do they not teach us to “yield ourselves living sacrifices to God,

^x Job xxvi. 10. and Ps. xxxvii. 4.

^z Gal. vi. 14.

^a Rom. vi. 11.

^c Eph. iv. 15.

^d 1 John i. 3.

^y 2 Cor. v. 14.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^e Eph. i. 13, 14.

as our most reasonable service^f?" Do they not enjoin us to "live henceforth not unto ourselves, but unto him that died for us and rose again^g?" Do they not require that "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God^h?" And is not the Holy Spirit (through whose Divine agency alone we can do any thing that is good) promised to us for this very end, to renew us after the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness?

And wherein do our own acknowledgments differ from this? Let us attend to the supplications which we offer before God:—"Grant, O most merciful Father, for Christ's sake, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of thy holy name." Here, so far from putting godliness out of our thoughts, we profess to desire it in the first place; and justly do we ask that first, because, without that, all our acts of righteousness and sobriety would be no better than splendid sins; they would want the motives and principles which alone distinguish them from heathen virtues. Mark too the measure and degree in which we desire these virtues: we are not satisfied with that which shall gain us a name among men; we ask, (and let it ever be remembered that without the influences of God's Spirit all our own efforts will be in vain,) that we may be enabled to attain such a degree of piety, as that God may be glorified in us, and that the transcendent excellence of Christianity may be visibly exhibited in our lives.

We appeal then to all; What do we, or what can we, ask of you more than this? And if these high attainments be not necessary, why do you ask of God for Christ's sake to give them to you? If, on the other hand, they are necessary, why are we deemed enthusiastic and over-righteous for requiring them at your hands? If in your prayers you mean what you say, you justify us; and, if you do not mean what you say, you condemn yourselves; you confess yourselves to be hypocrites and dissemblers with God.

^f Rom. xii. 1.^g 2 Cor. v. 15.^h 1 Cor. x. 31.

We have now finished our consideration of that truly scriptural prayer: and we will conclude with commending it to you as *a test* in a two-fold view.

First; Take it as *a test whereby to try the discourses which you hear*. As members of the Church of England, we have a right to expect that the discourses of ministers shall correspond with the Liturgy of our Church. Certainly, in the first instance, the Holy Scriptures are to be our guide: but, as all profess to have the Scriptures on their side, let us bring to our aid that excellent compendium of religion which we have been considering.

Are there any who descant upon the dignity of our nature, the goodness of our hearts, and the rectitude of our lives? What appearance do such sentiments make when brought to the touchstone of this prayer? Are they not as opposite as darkness is to light? and should we not regard such statements as the effusions of pride and ignorance? should we not tremble for those who hear them, lest, being “blind followers of the blind, they all together should fall into the ditchⁱ?”

Are there others who tell us that we are to be saved by our works, and who would thereby lull us asleep in impenitence, and divert our attention from the Saviour of the world? Let us not be deluded by the syren song. Let us turn to our own confessions, to refute such anti-christian doctrines: let us learn from them the necessity of humiliation and contrition, and of “fleeing to Christ, as to the refuge that is set before us.” As for the idea, that the founding of our hopes upon Christ, and upon the promises made to us in him, will lead to a neglect of good works, let us see what the compilers of our Liturgy thought of that, and what they have put in the mouths of all believing penitents. Do not the very same persons who seek for mercy through Christ, entreat of God that they may be enabled to “live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of his holy name?” And is it not notorious, that

ⁱ Matt. xv. 14.

the very persons who maintain most steadfastly the doctrines of faith, are uniformly condemned for the excessive and unnecessary strictness of their lives?

In the same manner, if there be any who plead for a conformity to the world, and decry all vital godliness as enthusiasm, we may see what judgment is to be formed of them also. They may call themselves Christians; but they have nothing of Christianity, except the name.

Lastly; If there be any who separate the different parts of religion, inculcating some to the neglect of others; magnifying works to the exclusion of faith, or establishing faith to the destruction of good works; or confounding faith and works, instead of distinguishing them as the fruit from the root; if such, I say, there be, let their statements be contrasted with the order, the fulness, and the harmony of this prayer; and the erroneousness of them will instantly appear. We do not wish to produce critical hearers; but it is the duty of every man to "prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good^k;" and as we have the advantage of an authorized standard of divine truth, we invite all to search that, as well as the Holy Scriptures: and we do not hesitate to say of this prayer in particular, what the prophet speaks of the inspired volume, "To the law, and to the testimony; if ministers speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them^l."

Next, let us take this prayer as *a test whereby to try our own experience*. We may now discard from our minds all that this or that minister may lay down as necessary to our salvation. We have here, what no man can reasonably dispute, our own acknowledgments. We have here as beautiful, as just, as scriptural a summary of experimental religion, as ever was penned from the foundation of the world. The man, that from his inmost soul can utter this prayer, is a real Christian. Whatever be his views with respect to some particular

^k 1 Thess. v. 21.

^l Isai. viii. 20.

doctrines (those I mean which are distinguished by the name of Calvinism,) his heart is right with God. Whether he admit or reject those abstruser points, he is accepted of God; and if he were to die this moment, he would be in heaven the next: the termination of his warfare would be to him the commencement of everlasting felicity. But is this the experience of us all? Would to God it were! All will repeat the words: but it is one thing to repeat, and another to feel, them. Let us then bring ourselves to this test; and never imagine that we are in a Christian state, till we can appeal to God, that this prayer is the very language of our hearts. In examining ourselves respecting it, let us inquire, Whether from our inmost souls we lament the numberless transgressions of our lives, and the unsearchable depravity of our hearts? When we cry to God for mercy as miserable offenders, do we abhor ourselves for our guilt, and tremble for our danger? Do we indeed feel that we deserve the wrath of Almighty God? Do we feel this, not only on some particular occasions, but, as it were, daily and hourly? Is the consciousness of it wrought into us, and become the habit of our minds, so that we can find no peace but in crying unto God, and pleading with him the merits of his dear Son? Is Christ, in this view, “precious” to our souls^m? Is HE “our wisdom, HE our righteousness, HE our sanctification, HE our complete redemptionⁿ?” Having nothing in ourselves, do we make HIM our “all in all^o?” Are we at the same time “renewed in the spirit of our minds?” Do we hate sin, not merely as it is destructive, but as it is defiling, to the soul? Do we account “the service of God to be perfect freedom;” and instead of wishing his law reduced to the standard of our practice, do we desire to have our practise raised to the standard of his law? Is it our labour to “shine as lights in a dark world,” and “to shew forth in our own conduct the *virtues* of him that has called us^p?” Let us all put these questions to

^m 1 Pet. ii. 7.^o Col. iii. 11.ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 30.^p 1 Pet. ii. 9. ἀπερὰς.

ourselves; and they will soon shew us what we are. If this be not the state of our souls, we are in an awful condition indeed. Our very best services have been nothing but a solemn mockery: in our prayers, we have insulted, rather than worshipped the Majesty of Heaven; we have come before our God "with a lie in our right hand^q." O that it might please God to discover to us the heinousness of our guilt; and that we might all be "pricked to the heart," ere it be too late! Let us, the very next time we attempt to use this prayer, take notice of the frame of our minds: let us mark the awful incongruity between our professions, and our actual experience: and let a sense of our hypocrisy lead us to repentance. Thus shall the returning seasons of worship be attended with a double advantage to our souls: in praying for what we ought to seek, we shall be stirred up to seek it in good earnest: and, through the tender mercy of our God, we shall attain the experience of those things, which too many of us, it is to be feared, have hitherto hypocritically asked, and ignorantly condemned.

^q Isai. xliv. 20.

MMI.

THE STABILITY OF THE PROMISES.

2 Cor. i. 20. *For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*

MANKIND in general discover much versatility in their spirit and conduct. They form purposes and rescind them according as they are influenced by carnal hopes or fears; but the Gospel teaches us to lay our plans with wisdom, and to execute them with firmness. A light, fickle, wavering mind, if not incompatible with, is at least unworthy of, the Christian character. St. Paul has been accused of "lightness" for not paying his intended visit to Corinth. It is probable too (as appears by his apology) that his

enemies had thrown out insinuations against his doctrine also, as though it could not be depended upon. He thought such charges extremely injurious to his person and ministry: he therefore first affirms that his doctrines had been uniform, and next appeals to God, that there had been the same uniformity in his conduct also^a. In speaking of his doctrine he digresses a little from his subject; but, what he says of the promises, is worthy of peculiar attention. It suggests to us the following important observations:

I. All the promises of God are made to us in Christ Jesus—

God has “given to us exceeding great and precious promises”—

[He has engaged to bestow all which can conduce to our *temporal* welfare: all too, which can promote our *spiritual* advancement. To this he has added all the glory and felicity of heaven itself. Such are the benefits annexed by God himself to real godliness^b.]

But all these are given to us only in Christ Jesus—

[Man, the instant he had sinned, was exposed to the wrath of God; nor could he any longer have a claim on the promises made to him in his state of innocence; but Christ became the head and representative of God's elect: with him God was pleased to enter into covenant for us^c, and to give us a promise of eternal life *in him*^d. Our original election of God, our adoption into his family, with every blessing consequent upon these, were confirmed to us *in him*^e: hence, in the text, it is *twice* said, that the promises are *in him*; and, in another place, that they were made before the existence of any human being^f: even when the covenant was apparently made with Abraham, Christ was the true seed in whom alone it was confirmed^g.]

From this circumstance they derive all their stability.

II. In him they are all firm and immutable—

The terms “Yea and Amen” import steadfastness and immutability. Now the promises cannot fail

^a ver. 23. He assures them that he had delayed his journey, not from fickleness of mind, but from tenderness to them.

^b 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^c Heb. viii. 6.

^d 2 Tim. i. 1.

^e Eph. i. 3—5. 11.

^f Tit. i. 2.

^g Gal. iii. 16, 17.

unless they be either revoked by God, or forfeited by man; but God will not suffer them to fail by either of these means—

He himself will not revoke them—

[Some of his promises are *absolute* and others *conditional*: the *conditional* are suspended on the performance of something by man: the *absolute* are made without respect to any thing to be done by us^h. If the former fail, it is not so properly a breach of promise, as an execution of a threatening implied in itⁱ: the latter never have failed in any one instance; nor can one jot or tittle of them ever fail to all eternity. This is declared in various passages of Holy Scripture^k. God's word, like his nature, has "no variableness or shadow of turning:" he confirmed his promises with an oath, in order that we might be more assured of the immutability of his counsel^l: hence it is expressly said, that "the promise is sure to all the seed^m."]]

Nor will he suffer his people to forfeit their interest in them—

[Doubtless his people, as free agents, are capable of apostatizing from the truth: yea, they are even bent to backslide from himⁿ; and, if left to themselves, they would inevitably fall and perish^o: hence they are bidden to take heed lest they come short of the promised blessings^p. St. Paul himself felt the need of much labour and self-denial to prevent his becoming a cast-away^q. Nevertheless these truths are not at all inconsistent with the doctrine insisted on: it is by the fear of falling, that God keeps us from falling^r; and he will keep us by his own power unto final salvation^s. Of this St. Paul was as confident as of any truth whatever^t; nor is there any other truth more abundantly confirmed in Scripture^u. God will indeed punish his people for their declensions^x; but, instead of casting them off, he will reclaim them from their errors^y: if it were not thus, not one only, but all of those, who had been given to Christ, might perish. God however will effectually prevent

^h Such are the declarations respecting the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, together with the consequent calling of the Gentiles, and the salvation of all that from eternity were given to Christ. John xvii. 6.

ⁱ This is the true import of what God says, Numb. xiv. 34.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 22. Isai. liv. 10. Jer. xxxi. 35—37. and xxxiii. 25, 26.

^l Heb. vi. 17.

^m Rom. iv. 16.

ⁿ Hos. xi. 7.

^o Isai. x. 4.

^p Heb. iv. 1.

^q 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^r Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^s 1 Pet. i. 5.

^t Phil. i. 6.

^u Rom. xi. 29. John x. 28, 29.

^x Ps. lxxxix. 30—32.

^y Ps. lxxxix. 33—35.

this^z; and the weakest of his people may join in the Apostle's triumph^a.]

This doctrine is far from being a matter of speculation only :

III. In their accomplishment God is glorified, and the ends of our ministry are answered—

The promises, as recorded in the Scriptures, are the foundation of our hopes : but it is by their accomplishment alone that the effects attributed to them are produced. In *that*,

1. God is glorified—

[Every perfection of the Deity is interested in the accomplishment of his word : the *mercy* and *love* of God have given us the promises : his *truth* and *faithfulness* are pledged to fulfil them : his almighty *power* is engaged to execute whatever his goodness has given us reason to expect. Were his promises to fail of accomplishment, these perfections would be all dishonoured ; but when they are fulfilled, these perfections are all glorified. Justice itself is made to harmonize with truth and mercy^b, and matter is furnished for endless praise and adoration.]

2. The ends of our ministry are answered—

[The great ends of our ministry are to convert, edify, and comfort immortal souls. In pursuance of these, we set before men those promises which are most suited to their respective conditions ; and assure them that their affiance in those promises shall bring them the blessings they desire. When therefore the contrite are brought to experience rest in Jesus, when the afflicted are comforted, the backsliding reclaimed, or the wavering established, then the great ends of our ministry are so far answered with respect to them. The truth of God in his promises is then made to appear ; the benefits contained in them are enjoyed by our fellow-creatures ; and our labours receive their richest recompence.]

APPLICATION—

[The Scripture speaks of some as “ heirs of promise,” and others as “ strangers from the covenant of promise.” Let us inquire to which of these characters we belong. Have we renounced every other hope, and rested simply on the promises made to us in Christ ? And are we living in the earnest ex-

^z Matt. xviii. 14. Jer. xxxii. 38—41.

^a Rom. viii. 38, 39.

^b Ps. lxxxv. 10.

pectation of their full accomplishment? Have we so embraced them as to shew that we are seeking another country^c? Let us not mistake our true and proper character. If we be *strangers from the covenant of promise*, we are without Christ, and without hope^d. The threatenings, and not the promises, belong to us, and they will infallibly be executed upon us in due season. O that we might now flee for refuge to the hope set before us! But if we be "*heirs of promise*," happy are we beyond all expression. Every promise of God, temporal, spiritual, or eternal, is made to us. Let every one then of this description be filled with consolation^e: let them also be followers of those, who now inherit the promises^f. May it never be said of them, that they glorify God by their faith, but dishonour him by their works! The promises are given, not merely to save, but to sanctify, the soul^g. Treasure up then, brethren, those inestimable pledges of God's love, and let them operate according to the direction given you^h.]

^c Heb. xi. 13, 14.^d Eph. ii. 12.^e Heb. vi. 18.^f Heb. vi. 12.^g 2 Pet. i. 4.^h 2 Cor. vii. 1.

MMII.

THE DIFFERENT OPERATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

2 Cor. i. 21, 22. *Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*

IT is the inseparable property of divine grace to make us jealous for the honour of God, and studious to promote it to the utmost of our power.

St. Paul, when accused of instability, vindicated his own character, because it was connected with his usefulness in the ministry; but instantly ascribed to God the glory of whatever steadfastness he had been enabled to maintain.

His words naturally point out to our consideration,

I. The blessings which all true Christians enjoy—

Though all Christians do not attain the same measure either of holiness or of comfort, yet there are blessings common to all who are born of God.

1. They are established in Christ—

[All who believe in Christ are united to him as “branches of the true vine.” At first indeed they are but as babes, or children, liable to be tossed to and fro^a; but by experience they become more rooted and grounded in Christ^b. As their views of their own weakness and of his sufficiency are enlarged, they grow more and more; nor was this peculiar to the Apostle, but the common privilege of all the Church at Corinth. Indeed, it is the great end for which all other blessings are communicated; and, in attaining it, the believer becomes immovable as Mount Sion^c.]

2. They are anointed with a heavenly unction—

[It is the communication of the Holy Spirit that first enables them to believe in Christ^d; but, as the lamps in the sanctuary, they have daily supplies of the holy oil. By means of these they obtain more abundant knowledge and grace^e, and are progressively renewed after the image of their God^f. Not that all, even of true Christians, are alike favoured; but every one receives according to the measure of the gift of Christ^g.]

3. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise—

[A seal is for the purpose of both marking and securing property; and with both these views the Holy Spirit seals the people of God. He stamps the very image of God himself upon their souls^h; he thus marks them as his peculiar, his “purchased possession;” he secures them also to the day of complete redemptionⁱ.]

4. They have the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts—

[An earnest is both *a part* of a payment, and *a pledge* of the remainder; and such is the Spirit to us, not in one only, but in all his operations. In illuminating, quickening, sanctifying, or comforting the soul, he is an earnest of that light and life, that purity and joy, which will be more richly communicated to us in the future world. As a seal, the Spirit assures us of our right to heaven; as an earnest, he gives us a foretaste of it.]

The consideration of such inestimable blessings may well lead us to inquire after,

II. The source from whence they flow—

^a Eph. iv. 14.

^b Col. ii. 7.

^c Ps. cxxv. 1.

^d 1 John ii. 20.

^e Isai. ii. 2, 3.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 16.

^g Eph. iv. 7.

^h Eph. iv. 23, 24.

ⁱ Eph. i. 14. and iv. 30.

It appears needless, at first sight, to enter minutely into this part of our subject : but the very construction of the sentence shews that there is something particularly emphatical in it. It implies,

1. That these blessings are purely the gift of God—

[They are not the creatures of a vain and heated imagination ; nor are they the offspring of man's will and power^k ; nor, though imparted in the use of means, do they *necessarily* flow from the means themselves. They are purely and entirely the gift of God^l, and are bestowed by Him according to his sovereign will and pleasure^m.]

2. That they evidently bear the Divine stamp and character upon them—

[The visible creation manifestly approves itself to be of Divine workmanshipⁿ, and in the same manner do these blessings evidently appear to proceed from God. The very effects which they produce upon the soul, discover this : but the conviction, which they, who possess these blessings, feel of their Divine original, is inexpressibly clear and strong^o : without the smallest hesitation they ascribe them to God as their only source^p.]

3. That God is glorified by means of them—

[It is the Apostle's express design to glorify God on account of them : and surely we cannot fail of admiring his power and goodness in them ; or experience them, without an increased desire to devote ourselves to him ; and most of all shall we adore him for these *beginnings* of his grace, when we shall have received their full *completion*.]

INFER—

1. How little is true religion known and experienced in the world!—

[Christianity is in general viewed as a system of restraints, rather than as a source of enjoyments ; but none can have a just view of it who do not experience a measure of these blessings. Let not any one then rest in false notions, or uninteresting professions. Let all seek rather such a religion as will make them holy and happy, and pray, with the Apostle, that God would fulfil in them all his good pleasure^q.]

2. How much do many true Christians live below their privileges —

^k John i. 13.

^l Jam. i. 17.

^m 1 Cor. xii. 6, 11.

ⁿ Ps. xix. 1.

^o Isai. xli. 20.

^p 2 Cor. v. 5.

^q 2 Thess. i. 11.

[Many, instead of enjoying a heaven upon earth, are filled with doubts and fears: yet even these have the image of God manifestly instamped upon them, and the hope which they possess is more precious to them than the whole world: but we may well say to them, “Why art thou lean, seeing thou art a king’s son?” Let them be ashamed of giving such occasion to the enemies of religion to triumph; and let them seek that full liberty which God will vouchsafe to all his children.]

3. How astonishing are our obligations to each person in the Sacred Trinity!—

[The Father is the great source and fountain of all our blessings: Christ is the procurer of them, and the medium through whom they come: and the Holy Spirit is the agent, by whom they are conveyed to us. Let us hold fellowship with each in his distinct office and character^r, and acknowledge with gratitude their united exertions; and let every blessing received from them quicken us to the service, and lead us to the enjoyment of our triune God.]

^r 1 John i. 3.

MMIII.

THE DEVICES OF SATAN EXPOSED.

2 Cor. ii. 11. *We are not ignorant of his devices.*

MEN in general think but little of Satan and his agency: yet is he the most formidable adversary that we have to contend with. Great was the grief which he occasioned to the Apostle Paul; and imminent was the danger to which he reduced many of the Church at Corinth. When one of the members of that Church had been guilty of the crime of incest, Satan stirred up many to support his cause, and to protect him from the censures he had merited. Again, when, at the Apostle’s instigation, the Church had inflicted punishment on the offender, and the correction had produced the desired effect, the same subtle enemy prompted many to harden their hearts against him, and, notwithstanding his acknowledged penitence, to refuse him a re-admission to communion with them. In both these ways, he laboured equally to under-

mine the interests of true religion; and, if St. Paul had not authoritatively interposed to regulate the conduct of that Church by the Gospel-standard, Satan would soon have prevailed to root out of it all vital godliness.

The Apostle's interposition was extremely painful to him. It was "with much anguish of heart and many tears" that he had written the former epistle: and the thought of having, however reluctantly, occasioned grief to those whom he had reproved, was so painful to him, that nothing but an assurance of good having accrued from it to them, and a consequent restoration of peace to their souls, could compose his mind^a. Still however he was bound to proceed in the discharge of his high office, and to urge upon them that duty which they were so backward to perform. And this he does, requesting them to "confirm their love towards the offender, (whose name from delicacy he forbears to mention,) lest Satan should get a further advantage over them;" for, adds he, "we are not ignorant of his devices." This was a weighty argument: and, that we may enter more fully into it, I propose to shew,

I. The devices of Satan—

It is but little that we know of them: yet, as far as we do know them, it will be profitable to consider,

1. Their number—

[This is great beyond all that we are able to conceive. I doubt whether the sands upon the sea-shore form such a countless multitude as do the devices of this great adversary. There is not a person of any age, or any condition, or under any circumstances, for whom he has not devices peculiarly fitted, as a key to the wards of a most ingenious and complicated lock. For every successive variation in their circumstances, he can in an instant adapt his temptations, and so modify them to the occasion, as to give them the greatest possible influence over the mind of his victim.

It must not be forgotten, that, though we speak of Satan as one, he has millions of other spirits at his command, all co-operating with him with an activity inconceivable, and an energy

^a ver. 2—4.

incessant. All of these were once bright and glorious angels around the throne of God: but "they kept not their first estate;" and, for their wickedness, were cast down to the regions of darkness; whence however for a season they are permitted to emerge, in order that they may exert their powers, and subserve unwittingly the counsels of the Most High. Of these there are distinct orders, called principalities and powers, all under Satan as their head and leader, whose will they execute, and whose designs they promote. Hence, though Satan is limited both as to space and knowledge, he is, by his agents, in every part of the globe, receiving information from them, and exercising rule by means of them: and hence his devices, founded on such a combination of wisdom, and carried into effect by such an union of power, become so manifold as to exceed what on any other supposition would have been within the power of any finite creature to devise and execute. In a word, they are to any but God himself altogether unsearchable and without number.]

2. Their subtilty—

[We have already said, that he knows how to adapt his temptations to all different persons and occasions. But the subtilty of Satan is yet farther discoverable in this, that he puts such a specious appearance on his temptations, as removes from us all suspicion from whence they come. "He transforms himself into an angel of light^b," so that his suggestions seem rather to bear the character of heaven than the stamp of hell. Who would think that he should pretend a zeal for God's honour, and make use of the very perfections of God to countenance and confirm his impious suggestions? Yet so he did, both in his assaults on the first Adam in Paradise, and on the second Adam in the Wilderness. When he sought to prevail over our first parents, he asked "Hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree in the garden?" that is, You surely must have made a mistake: it cannot be that so good and bountiful a God should have laid upon you any such unkind restriction. Then again, when Eve replied, that God had not only forbidden the use of that tree, but had enforced the prohibition by the sanction of death, he answered, "Ye shall not surely die;" you may be perfectly assured that God is too good ever to inflict such an awful penalty for so trivial a transgression. In like manner, when he took our Lord to a pinnacle of the temple, and advised him to cast himself down, for that God had engaged to preserve him from all evil, and had given his angels charge over him for that very purpose; his argument was, in fact, You may safely cast yourself down, for God,

^b 2 Cor. xi. 14.

who cannot lie, has pledged his truth and faithfulness for your preservation. Perhaps there is no one device in which his subtilty more appears than this: for it is by a pretended zeal for God's honour more than by any other thing whatever, that he leads men to sin, and lulls them asleep in sin. To one, he suggests, that God is too merciful to consign over any man to everlasting torments: to another, that God is too holy and too just ever to pardon such iniquities as *he* has committed: and then to another, that God, as a mighty Sovereign, has ordained men to life, and will save them without any trouble or efforts of their own. In all these instances he employs the very name and character of God, in order to subvert God's influence in the world.

Another point wherein his subtilty appears is, in his choice of instruments whereby to operate the more forcibly upon our minds. He will be sure to employ such as will have most influence, and such as we should be least likely to suspect. Whom should he employ to seduce Adam from his allegiance, but Eve, whom God had given him to be his comfort and support? It was most probably with the hope of using her influence to tempt her husband, that Satan spared Job's wife, whom he might have destroyed, together with his children: and how readily she concurred with Satan, appears from the advice she gave Job in his extremity, "Curse God, and die." When he wanted to instigate Ahab to his destruction, whose agency did he employ but that of the four hundred and fifty prophets, whose united testimony Ahab could not withstand? and when he sought to divert even Jesus himself from the great work of redeeming a ruined world, by whom did he endeavour to accomplish his purpose, but by Peter, a favourite Disciple, and that too under a semblance of love?

Well is he called "that old serpent:" for, in truth, he is "a crooked serpent," whose windings are only equalled by his venom.]

3. Their power—

[But who can estimate this, seeing that "he deceiveth the whole world^d?" It is on this account that he is called "the god of this world," for he "worketh in all the children of disobedience^e," and "leads them captive at his will^f." What he would effect, if suffered to execute all his own pleasure, we may see in Peter, whom he sifted as wheat, and would soon have reduced to chaff, if the Saviour himself had not interceded for him that his faith might not fail^g. When expelled from the demoniac, he entered into a herd of swine,

^e Matt. xvi. 22, 23. ^d Rev. xii. 9. ^e 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^g Luke xxii. 31, 32.

who all ran immediately down the mountain, and perished in the sea. And thus it would be with all of us, if God gave us over to his uncontrolled dominion; we should precipitate ourselves speedily into irrecoverable and endless ruin. In the hands of that "great dragon," we should be no more than as a lamb in the jaws of a roaring lion.]

But though in all their extent they cannot be known by us, yet, as far as they can be known, we are anxious to mark,

II. The importance of being thoroughly acquainted with them—

It is of unspeakable importance to us all,

1. Individually—

[There is not an individual amongst us, "at whose right hand he does not stand^h," and whom he is not seeking to destroy. "As a roaring lion, he is going about continually for this very end," seeking to find some one off his guard, that he may prevail the more easily against him. He notices particularly *the dispositions of our mind*, and is constantly on the watch that he may ensnare us by means of our besetting sin. Does he see David inclining to pride and vain confidence? he puts it into his heart to give an order for the numbering of the people; well knowing that by means of that act God would be provoked to execute upon him and on his people some heavy judgmentⁱ. Did he see in Judas the love of money? by that he draws him to betray his Lord. Did he behold in Peter the fear of man? he instigates several to accuse him as a follower of Christ, and thereby causes him to deny his Lord with oaths and curses. Did he see Ananias and Sapphira affecting man's applause? he puts it into their heart to appear liberal at a cheap rate; and then, for the preservation of their character, to lie unto the Holy Ghost. Thus he will watch the motions of our hearts; and, by means of some evil propensity in us, drive us to the commission of some heinous sin. Nor is he inattentive even to *the state and temperament of our bodies*; since from that also he can derive much advantage against us. If he perceive that our bodies are enervated by heavy afflictions, or such disorders as induce both bodily and mental debility, he will be sure to assault the soul, in order to drive it to despondency. The whole system being weakened, he hopes that he shall the more easily prevail against us to destroy us. In a word, he knows the weak side of all, and will be sure to assault us there. Hence arises a

^h Josh. iii. 1, 2.

ⁱ 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

particular necessity for watching against him with all possible care. Whatever there be, either in our minds or bodies, that seems to favour his temptations, it is only with our own concurrence that he can effect any thing: against our will he can do nothing. "If we resist him, he is constrained to flee from us." But the difficulty is, to know when, and where, and how he will assault us. Could the bird certainly know that the fowler was laying a snare for him, he would take care not to run into the net; and could the fish be fully aware of the hook, he would never be induced to swallow the bait. Thus, if we knew beforehand what the devices were whereby Satan was studying to deceive us, we should stand on our guard against him. But it requires a very deep knowledge of "his wiles," and a constant watchfulness over every motion of our hearts, to resist him with effect.]

2. In our collective capacity—

[Whole Churches are often grievously distracted by this powerful adversary. Where Christ is sowing wheat, he will be active in sowing tares. It was thus at Corinth: he had prevailed to a great extent, first in setting the people against all discipline, and then in urging them to carry their discipline beyond all reasonable bounds. The latter device would have been attended with incalculable evil, if it had not been exposed and counteracted by Paul: the offender himself might have been driven to despair, and constrained to go back for happiness to the ungodly world. The weak in the Church would have been greatly discouraged: and unbelievers would have been led to think of Christianity as the most odious system that had ever been professed in the world. In like manner, there are in every Church some circumstances which Satan would over-rule for the dishonour of God and the injury of immortal souls. Against these therefore, whatever they may be, both minister and people should be much upon their guard. In matters of *doctrine*, our subtle adversary may easily lead us astray; and in matters of *discipline*, he may easily succeed in stirring up contentions and divisions amongst us. If we neglect to purge out the old leaven, the whole lump will soon be leavened: and if with too indiscriminate a hand we attempt to pluck up the tares, we may root up also much of the wheat along with it. We are in danger on every side: and if we do not, with the utmost possible care, guard against his devices, he will, in some way or other, "get advantage of us," to the weakening of our hands, and the great discouragement of our hearts.]

As an IMPROVEMENT of the subject, we will briefly shew how most effectually to counteract his devices—

1. Be ever on your guard against them—

[You have to contend, “not against flesh and blood only, but against principalities and powers:” and therefore must be continually on your guard. This is the advice which Peter gives, and gives from bitter experience. He had been warned by his Lord to watch and pray, and especially because Satan was peculiarly anxious to destroy him. But he slept, yea slept repeatedly, though repeatedly awaked by his Lord: and the consequence was, that he “fell into the snare of the devil.” Hence he warns others to “be sober and vigilant, because the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour.” Moreover, it was in consequence of the Saviour “praying for him that his faith might not fail,” that he did not ultimately perish, like Judas, in deep despair. Hence he adds this further direction, “whom resist, steadfast in the faith^k.” It is scarcely to be hoped, however vigilant you may be, that Satan shall never get any advantage over you; but you must not on that account despond, as if he were invincible: for your God has pledged himself that “he will bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” Rely therefore on his word; and in the strength of it go forth again and again to the combat; praying always, that God would either “not lead you into temptation,” or, if he do, that he would “deliver you from *the evil one*.” It is said of young men in Christ, “that the word of God abideth in them, and they have overcome the wicked one.” Let it abide in you also; and success is yours. The Lord Jesus Christ drew all his arrows from that quiver: “It is written,” was the reply with which he vanquished every temptation: and with “that sword of the Spirit, the Word of God,” you shall speedily and eternally prevail.]

2. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Protector and Deliverer—

[He is “stronger than the strong man armed:” and, whilst he yet hanged upon the cross, he bruised the serpent’s head; yes, “by death he overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” On the cross “he spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, triumphing over them in it:” and in his ascension “he led captivity itself captive.” Then was the god of this world vanquished: “then was the prince of this world cast out.” It is therefore only with a vanquished foe that we have to contend; for “the prince of this world is judged.” Go forth then “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” Our almighty Joshua calls

^k 1 Pet. v. 8.

you to come and put your feet on the necks of your vanquished enemies. Do it; and assure yourselves, that through him you shall be "more than conquerors over all." For a little time this subtle adversary will yet continue his assaults. It was only "for a season" that he suspended his efforts even against the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Depend upon it, therefore, that you shall have some "thorn in the flesh, some messenger of Satan, still to buffet you." But "be strong and very courageous." "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "Gird on the whole armour" provided for you in the Gospel; and "quit yourselves like men." If you say, "True, but I am weak;" know that, "when you are weak, then are you strong;" and "the strength of Christ shall be perfected in your weakness." The palm of victory, and the victor's robe, are already provided for you: and, after a few more conflicts, your triumph shall be complete. Already may you "behold Satan fallen from heaven, like lightning!" Hallelujah! hallelujah!]

¹ Luke x. 18.

MMIV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MINISTRY.

2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. *We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?*

THE difficulties which faithful ministers have to encounter, are great and numerous. Through the goodness of God, the flames of persecution are not permitted to rage against them, as in the apostolic age; but the embers are by no means extinguished; hatred and contempt are yet the portion of all who will bear their testimony for God, and reprove the wickedness of an ungodly world. But if "their afflictions abound, their consolations abound also." They are sustained by the providence and grace of God, and have reason to "thank him for causing them always to triumph in Christ." They have also the satisfaction of seeing, that God, by their instrumentality, "makes manifest the savour of his knowledge in every place." And though they are unhappily

the occasion of deeper condemnation to those who reject their message, yet are they accepted and approved of God, as well in their ineffectual, as in their successful, labours.

This is the consolation expressed in the text ; from whence we shall take occasion to shew,

I. In what way the ministry of the Gospel is regarded by God—

God is pleased to speak of himself as delighting in the ministry of his Gospel—

[That which his servants labour to diffuse, is, the knowledge of Christ. They set forth incessantly his name, his work, and offices: and exalt him as the only Saviour of the world — — — This, like the sacrifice which Noah^a, and which Christ himself, offered^b, is to God “an odour of a sweet smell.” It is to him “as ointment poured forth^c.”]

And good reason there is why he should be so delighted with it—

[The Gospel of Christ is that wherein all the glory of God is concentrated and made manifest. We may behold the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God in the works of creation and providence; but in the work of redemption we see an united display of all his perfections: “Mercy and truth meet together; and righteousness and peace kiss each other^d” — — — No wonder therefore that his ministers, who proclaim this Gospel, are considered as rendering to him an acceptable service.]

Nor does his approbation of it at all depend on the success with which it is attended—

[God is certainly well pleased when any “are saved” by his Gospel: for then all his gracious purposes respecting them are accomplished — — — Then is his dear Son honoured, and, as it were, rewarded “for the travail of his soul^e.” Then “mercy,” his darling attribute, “in which he chiefly delights,” has free and full scope for exercise.

But God is no less glorified “in them also that perish:” for they must to all eternity acknowledge the goodness of God towards them; and confess his justice in the judgments inflicted on them.

To *us* the punishment of the wicked is a ground of lamen-

^a Gen. viii. 21.

^b Eph. v. 2.

^c Cant. i. 3.

^d Ps. lxxxv. 10.

^e Isai. liii. 11.

tation only: but we must not “ imagine that God is such an one as ourselves:” whatever tends to his glory, is pleasing in his sight.]

Our pleasure, however, in ministering the Gospel, is mixed with pain, when we reflect on,

II. The effects which it produces upon men—

To some we are an occasion of deeper condemnation—

[It had been foretold by the prophet, that Christ should be, not merely for a sanctuary, but also for a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence^f. The holy patriarch, who embraced our Saviour in his arms, declared, that he was set for the fall, as well as for the rising again, of many in Israel^g. Our Lord himself also attests, that the design of his coming was, to shut the eyes of those who proudly imagined that they saw aright, as well as to open the eyes of those who were sensible of their blindness^h. And the ministrations of his Apostles were actually attended with these contrary effectsⁱ. Thus *we* also find it at this time: we are, however unwillingly, the unhappy occasion of increasing the misery of many whom we labour to save. Some hear our word, and disregard it—others despise it—others abuse it, to encourage themselves in their evil ways. For all such persons it would have been better never to have heard the word at all^k.]

To others, we are the means and instruments of their salvation—

[As odours which are most offensive to some are most pleasing and refreshing to others, so are we in the discharge of our ministry. Some hear our word, and receive it with joy and gratitude. The name of Jesus becomes truly precious to them: they trust in him for salvation: they are brought by him into a state of reconciliation with God: they receive out of his fulness all the grace which they stand in need of: they are enabled by him to live a new and heavenly life; and, finally, they are exalted by him to a state of everlasting happiness and glory. In effecting this blessed work, we are his highly-honoured instruments: by our word he quickens them from the dead; by our word he gives them life more abundantly; by our word he carries on, and perfects, the work he has begun. And thus, while to some we are “ a savour of death to their death” and condemnation, we are to others “ a savour of life to their eternal life” and salvation.]

^f Isai. viii. 14. ^g Luke ii. 34. ^h John ix. 39.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. with Acts xxviii. 25—27.

^k John xv. 22. Matt. xi. 20—24.

Well might St. Paul, in contemplating these effects of his ministry, express his sense of,

III. Its arduousness and importance—

Let it only be considered what a sacred trust is committed to us: on the one hand the glory of God, and on the other hand the salvation of man, is entrusted to our care: What a treasure is this to be deposited in such earthen vessels as we are! “Who is sufficient for these things?” Who is sufficient,

1. In wisdom and knowledge—

[To discharge the ministerial office aright, we should understand in all its bearings that mystery which was hid from ages—the redemption of man by the incarnation and death of God’s only-begotten Son. We should be acquainted also with all the devices of Satan, whereby he is continually labouring to defeat the gracious purposes of our God. We should be able also to discriminate between all the shades of Christian experience, so as to administer suitable advice to all who are under our care. The effects of ignorance would be most fatal: we should be “blind leaders of the blind;” and thus, together with our deluded hearers, should “fall into the ditch.” Alas! alas! Who has not reason to lament his utter insufficiency for so great a work?]

2. In zeal and love—

[If we duly considered the importance of our work, we should find neither time nor inclination to think of any thing else. We should scarcely allow ourselves the necessary refreshments of food and sleep. Persons who see us a little earnest are ready to give us credit for our zeal, or perhaps to condemn us for it: but we should not minister in the way we do, if we justly appreciated the value of a soul, or the glory of our God. No, truly; we should never think of you but with the tenderest compassion, nor even speak to you but with floods of tears. Whether we spake to you in public or in private, we should take no denial: and, in our addresses to God in your behalf, we should “give him no rest, till he arose, and made our Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”]

APPLICATION—

[Inquire, What improvement you have made of our ministry? We ask, not merely whether you approve of what you hear? but whether you find it a sweet savour unto your souls? Does it endear to you the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it bring you into closer and more habitual communion with him? Does

it stir you up to live more to his glory? Let not our labours of love be the means of augmenting your guilt and misery. Force us not to be "swift witnesses against you" in the day of judgment: but rather seek, that we may have you as our joy and crown of rejoicing in that day.

In the meantime, "pray for us." Our responsibility is great and fearful. It is no light matter to answer for our own souls: but to have your souls also required at our hands, is formidable in the extreme. May God pity our infirmities, and pardon our insufficiency! Yea, may he so "perfect his own strength in our weakness," that, through our feeble ministrations, his name may be glorified, and your souls be saved!]

MMV.

CHRISTIANS ARE EPISTLES OF CHRIST.

2 Cor. iii. 2, 3. *Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.*

HATEFUL and detestable as boasting is, there are occasions whereon it may be proper, and even necessary. As far as a man's own reputation merely is concerned, he need not be forward to vindicate himself from false accusations: if he be a holy and consistent character, he may safely leave himself in God's hands, indifferent about the censures of an ungodly world: but where the honour of the Gospel is at stake, and there is danger of its influence being undermined by the falsehoods that are circulated, it is by no means unworthy even of an Apostle to refute the calumnies that are raised against him. There were at Corinth false teachers, who sought by all possible means to destroy the character of the Apostle Paul, and who even denied his claim to apostolic authority. In answer to their malignant accusations, St. Paul, in his former Epistle to the Corinthians, says, "Am I not an Apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are not you my work in the Lord? If I be not an Apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye

in the Lord^a." Thus, in this epistle also he vindicates himself as ministering, not like the false teachers, who corrupted the word of God, but with a holy integrity befitting his high office^b. Yet apprehensive lest he should be misunderstood, as though he felt a need of such commendations either from himself or others, he appealed to his converts themselves as proofs sufficient of his apostleship, even such proofs as carried, to the most thoughtless beholder, their own evidence along with them: "Ye are our epistle, &c. &c.:" that is, 'I need not epistles from men, since ye yourselves are epistles from the Lord Jesus Christ, testifying that I am his servant, and that the Gospel which I preach is the very truth of God.'

In further considering these words, we may notice from them,

I. The character of all true converts—

Christians are epistles of Christ, written for the instruction of the whole world. Epistles from man to man, such as were those which the false teachers carried with them as letters of recommendation from Church to Church, were written with ink; but Christ's epistles are written with the Spirit of the living God; and not, as the law of the ten commandments was, in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart; to which God alone can have access, and on which God alone can make any valuable impressions. Ministers indeed are used by him as instruments, as the word also is; but these can effect no more than a pen or ink can without the hand of a writer: "Paul may plant, and Apollos may water; but it is God alone who can give the increase^c."

By these epistles the Lord Jesus Christ teaches men,

1. What is that change that must be wrought on every child of man—

[Christians once walked after the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were

^a 1 Cor. ix. 1, 2.

^b 2 Cor. ii. 17.

^c 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.

children of wrath, even as others^d. But a great change has been wrought in them: they have been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." They are become "new creatures:" their views, their desires, their pursuits, are all new. The change that has taken place in them is not unlike that of a river, which, from flowing rapidly towards the ocean, is arrested in its course, and made by the reflux tide to return with equal rapidity towards the fountain-head. Thus are these turned "in the spirit of their minds," the whole bent of which was formerly after the things of time and sense, but is now directed to the service of the living God^e.

These being still *in* the world, though not *of* it, are living instructors to all around them: they are epistles "known and read of all men." From the Scriptures men will turn their eyes; but from these epistles they cannot: they are constrained to see the truths recorded in them: and, however they may hate the change which they behold, they are compelled to acknowledge it: and they are admonished by it, that, without such a change, they themselves can never be partakers of the kingdom of heaven. In a word, by every true convert, Christ speaks to all, as once he did to Nicodemus, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven."]

2. By what means that change is to be effected—

[However the followers of Christ may differ from each other in minor points, they all agree in founding their hopes of salvation entirely on his atoning blood, and on the effectual operation of his Spirit within them: the declaration of every one amongst them is, "Surely in the Lord, and in him alone, have I righteousness and strength^f."

These things then does the Lord Jesus Christ proclaim to the world by them. By them he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." "There is no other name but mine given under heaven whereby men may be saved;" "nor is there any other foundation whereon any man can build" his hopes. 'And, as they look to me for their acceptance with God, so must they also do for the gift of my Spirit, who alone can begin, or carry on, or perfect, a work of grace in their souls.' It is in reality this testimony which so offends the world. If they were taught to rely on their own merits, or to depend on their own arm, they would extol the persons who thus distinguished themselves by their superior attainments in holiness: but, when they are told that all their hope must be in the righteousness of another, and in strength communicated from above, they pour contempt

^d Eph. ii. 2, 3.

^e 1 Thess. i. 9.

^f Isai. xlv. 24.

upon it all as foolishness. Nevertheless such are the lessons which Christians teach to all around them; and such are the instructions which Christ conveys by them to a benighted world.]

Whilst they thus speak from Christ they give us just occasion also to notice,

II. The honour they reflect on the Gospel of Christ—

They are all not merely epistles *from* Christ, but witnesses also *for* him. As the Jews were witnesses for God to all nations of the earth, since no other god could ever have effected what he had wrought for them^g, and as all the persons whom Jesus healed were witnesses for him as the true Messiah^h, so are all true converts witnesses,

1. Of the truth of the Gospel—

[What other system ever wrought as that has done? Look at all the means which men have devised for obtaining reconciliation with God; and see if they have ever operated so powerfully, and so beneficially, on the souls of those who have embraced them, as has the simple doctrine of the cross? No: by no other doctrine did God ever work, nor by any other doctrine will he ever work, for the sanctification and salvation of a ruined world. Go to any place under heaven where Christ is not exalted as the only Saviour of the world, or where the Spirit of the living God is not honoured as the only source of all real holiness of heart and life, and see what the state is of those who are so taught: will there be found among them any work like that on the day of Pentecost? Will the word preached there be quick, and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword? Will “the weapons used there be found mighty to pull down the strong holds” of sin and Satan, and to “bring men’s thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ?” No: God does not, and will not, work by any thing but a simple exhibition of Christ crucified. It is the Gospel only that is “the rod of his strength,” or that will ever prove “the power of God to the salvation of the soul.” But where that is preached, these effects are wrought; multitudes are “brought out of darkness into marvellous light,” and are enabled to shew by their works the reality of their faith; and thus they give undoubted evidence, that the Gospel which is ministered unto them is the true Gospel. As Christ said of the people whom he had healed, “The works that I do, the same bear witness of

^g Isai. xliii. 10—12.

^h Matt. xi. 25.

me," so may we say of these persons, that they are "seals," whereby God himself attests the mission of his servants, and the truth of the doctrine which they deliver.]

2. Of the efficacy of the Gospel—

[It is not a mere external change which the Gospel effects, but a change of the whole soul, from sin and sorrow to holiness and joy. The "peace" which it introduces into the troubled mind, "passeth all understanding:" and the "joy" to which it elevates the repenting sinner, is "unspeakable and glorified." In respect of sanctification, it does not produce absolute perfection; for "there is not a man on earth that liveth and sinneth not;" but it transforms the soul in a very wonderful manner, and changes it progressively, if not perfectly, "into the very image of God, in righteousness and true holiness." In short, it brings the Lord Jesus Christ and the believer into so near an union with each other, that they are one bodyⁱ, and "one spirit^k," partakers of the same blessings in this world^l, and heirs of the same glory in the world to come^m.

What other doctrine ever did, or can, effect such a change as this? Not even God's law, which he wrote in tables of stone, could operate to such an extent as this: the Gospel alone is competent to such a task: as St. Paul has said; "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, did; that is, he condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spiritⁿ." Moreover, it is not on those only who are of a better and more pliant frame of mind, that the Gospel thus operates, but on the vilest of the human race; as indisputably appeared in the Corinthian Church^o———The instances too of such efficacy are not rare, but frequent. On one day were three thousand such converts made; and in every age from that period to the present has the same power been exerted to change the lion to a lamb, and "a desert to the garden of the Lord." Such converts "shine as lights in a dark world," and, by "holding forth the word of life" as epistles from Christ, they shew that "the minister has not run in vain, nor laboured in vain^p."]

ADDRESS—

1. Seek to have the mind of Christ more fully inscribed upon your hearts—

ⁱ Eph. v. 30. ^k 1 Cor. vi. 17. ^l John xvii. 13, 22, 23, 26.

^m Rom. viii. 17. ⁿ Rom. viii. 3, 4. ^o 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

^p Phil. ii. 15, 16.

[Beloved brethren, let not a day pass without your having some divine lesson written more clearly and more legibly upon your souls. Bring your hearts daily to the Lord Jesus Christ, and present them as a tablet to him, that he may write upon them something which they have not hitherto contained. And when you come up to the house of God, come, not to gratify curiosity, or to perform a duty merely, but to spread your hearts again before the Lord, that, by the instrumentality of his minister, and the operation of his word and Spirit, he may inscribe on them some further lesson, which shall attract the notice of an ungodly world, and constrain them to acknowledge that God is with you of a truth. If there be a blot upon your hearts, entreat him to erase it: and whatever is but indistinctly written, entreat him to trace it over again and again, till it shall appear in characters worthy of the Divine Author, and convey to all who behold it a decisive proof of its divine original. And, at the close of every day, examine the contents of the epistle, to see what progress has been made, and what yet remains to be added for its perfection. Nor ever forget by whom the characters must be inscribed: it is "by the Spirit of the living God," and by the Lord Jesus Christ through him. If you look to any other quarter, you will be disappointed: but, if you go to Christ for the gift of his Spirit, and desire really to have his whole mind and will written upon your hearts, it shall be done; till you are "changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God."]

2. Endeavour to exhibit the whole mind of Christ to a careless and ungodly world—

[Let there not be seen in you those tempers and dispositions which dishonour the Christian profession, and make the Gospel a stumbling-block to the world. In too many professors of religion there is little seen but pride, and forwardness, and self-confidence, and loquacity, and uncharitableness, and a disputatious temper, and a party spirit. But are these the characters inscribed by Christ? No: but by that wicked one, who counterfeits the hand of Christ, on purpose to bring him and his Gospel into general contempt. Whatever there is of such dispositions within you, get them obliterated without delay; and all the graces of humility, and meekness, and love, inscribed in their place⁹. People will judge of our ministry by the lives of those who attend it; and will impute to our doctrines every evil which they can find in you. This is unreasonable indeed: but they will do so; and we cannot prevent it; and if they see in you what is

⁹ Col. iii. 12, 13.

odious, they will represent it as the necessary fruit of the system you profess. Take care then that "the way of truth be not evil spoken of through you." Endeavour rather so to "make your light shine before men, that all who behold it may glorify your Father which is in heaven:" yea, "let it shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."]

MMVI.

THE EXTENT OF MAN'S IMPOTENCY.

2 Cor. iii. 5. *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.*

COMMONLY as these words are cited, they are not easy to be satisfactorily explained. There is an evident abruptness in them: and they appear to go far beyond what the context requires. The Apostle had spoken of the success of his ministry; and "thanked God for making manifest the savour of the knowledge of Christ by him in every place^a." He had appealed to the Corinthians, as living witnesses of the power of Christ in his ministry; seeing that they were, in fact, "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men^b." And he trusted that God would yet further manifest his power, in carrying on amongst them, and in other places, the work of men's salvation, through the instrumentality of his ministry^c. But whilst he spoke thus, did he arrogate any thing to himself, as though these effects were produced by any powers of his own? No: he utterly disclaimed all such pretensions; and declared, that, so far from being able to convert others by any powers of his own, he had not of himself a sufficiency even to think a good thought: his sufficiency even for that, and much more for all his ministerial success, was from God alone.

The word which we here translate "*think any thing*," means also to *reason*^d: and if it could have borne the sense of *convincing by reasoning*, that is the sense we should have preferred: because that

^a 2 Cor. ii. 14.^b ver. 2, 3.^c ver. 4.^d λογισασθαι.

would have been the precise idea which the subject called for. But, as no such construction can be put upon it, we are convinced that the version given to it in our translation is right; and that the Apostle must be understood as going *designedly* beyond what the occasion called for, and as intending to intimate, not only that he could not convert others by any power of his own, but not even excite any good thought within his own bosom, unless he were strengthened for it from above. He had before said, "Who is sufficient for these things^e?" and here he ascribes all his sufficiency, *for every part of his ministry*, to God alone^f.

To mark fully the meaning of the Apostle, I will endeavour to shew whence all our sufficiency arises,

I. For the communicating of good to the souls of others—

Whatever force there may be in the *reasonings* of men, or whatever fascination in their eloquence, it is certain that neither the one nor the other have any power to convert a soul to God—

[Our blessed Lord spake to many, in vain. Though he spake as never man spake either before or since, yet did he not convince all his hearers. If "some said, He is a good man; others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people^g." Nor did his miracles produce the same effect on all. The poor man, whose eyes he had opened, argued with the Pharisees in vain, because their minds were not open to conviction: "Herein is a marvellous thing," said he, "that ye know not from whence this Jesus is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Since the world began, was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was *born* blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." And what was the effect of this reasoning? It only incensed them the more; and caused them to pass on the poor man a sentence of excommunication^h. One would have thought that the raising of Lazarus from the grave, after he had been dead four days, should have carried conviction to all: but the chief priests, instead of being duly

^e 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^f See the repetition of the word in in ver. 5, 6. *ικανοί, ικανότης, ικανώσεν*, the force of which is lost in our translation.

^g John vii. 12.

^h John ix. 30—34.

influenced by it themselves, sought to put Lazarus to death, in order to obstruct the influence of this miracle on the minds of othersⁱ. Thus it was also with the Apostles. When, in consequence of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon them on the day of Pentecost, they were enabled to address persons of different countries, each in their own particular language, some, who beheld this stupendous miracle, only "mocked at it, and said that the Apostles were full of new wine," and in a state of intoxication at nine o'clock in the morning^k. So when Paul pleaded the Saviour's cause before Festus and Agrippa, Festus, who was full of prejudice, cried out, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning hath made thee mad:" whilst Agrippa, who was more intelligent and more candid, said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian^l." In fact, truth hath no force with those who have not eyes to see it.]

Whatever good, therefore, is done to any man, it must be ascribed to God alone—

[It was "the Lord who opened the heart of Lydia to attend to the things that were spoken by Paul^m:" and to a want of such a divine operation did he ascribe the obstinacy of the Jews whom he addressed at Rome. After expounding the Scriptures from morning to evening to many of them in vain, he said, "Well spake the Holy Ghost, by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing; and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal themⁿ." So true is that declaration of Solomon, "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them^o." And most important is this truth for the instruction of all who minister in holy things, that they may know where to look for the success of their labours: for "neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase^p."]]

From the same divine source must be derived all our sufficiency,

II. For the exercising of good in our own souls—

The foregoing observations illustrate the Apostle's

ⁱ John xii. 10, 11. ^k Acts ii. 11—15. ^l Acts xxvi. 24—28.

^m Acts xvi. 14. ⁿ Acts xxviii. 23—27.

^o Prov. xx. 12. ^p 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

argument. What I shall now adduce is for the illustration of his particular *assertion*, that “of himself he could not even think a good thought.”

There is not, in unassisted man, an *inclination* to entertain a good thought—

[“The heart of the sons of men is full of evil^a :” yea, “every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts is evil, only evil, continually^r.” What is *morally* good *may* arise in the hearts of many : but what is *spiritually* good must be put there by the special agency of the Holy Ghost. Kindness, benevolence, compassion, though certainly referable to God as their prime Author, exist in the minds of many who are not partakers of saving grace : but hatred of sin, and love to God and Christ, and holiness, find no place in the bosom of an unconverted man : there is between him and them as great a difference as between “light and darkness, or Christ and Belial :” they have not, they cannot have, communion with each other^s. As well might a stone ascend of itself, or a spark descend, as an ungodly man give birth to that which is so foreign to his nature, as spiritual good is to a carnal heart.]

Nor is there in unassisted man a *capacity* to cherish what is truly good—

[We are told, from unquestionable authority, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ; for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned^t.” This may be illustrated by the metaphor which St. Paul makes use of in the preceding context. He has spoken of “spreading the *savour* of the knowledge of Christ ;” and has stated, that, in his ministry, he was to some “a savour of death unto death, and to others a savour of life unto life^u.” Now we know that odours have very different effects on different persons : the very same odour which to one may be grateful and reviving, to another may be offensive and injurious : and none but God could reverse these tendencies. So, to some, the sublimest truths of the Gospel appear only as “foolishness, whilst to others they are the wisdom of God and the power of God.” And whence is this, but because a spiritual discernment has been given to the one, whilst the other possesses only that natural intellect which is conversant with earthly things ? In a word, “to the one it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven ; but to the other it is not given^x :” nor, till

^a Eccl. ix. 3.

^t 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^r Gen. vi. 5.

^u 2 Cor. ii. 14—16.

^s 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

^x Matt. xiii. 11.

"God, of his own good pleasure, has given us to *will* and to *do* what is pleasing in his sight^y," shall we ever *do* it, or ever so much as *will* it. Our sufficiency for the one, as well as for the other, must come from God alone: for "without Christ we can do nothing^z."]

SEE, then, in this subject,

1. What matter there is for humiliation—

[It is scarcely possible to conceive any thing more humiliating than the declaration in my text. And if any man doubt the truth of it, let him look back and see, even in the space of the longest life, who ever, *by the force of his own natural powers*, entertained so much as one thought that was truly in accordance with God's perfect law, or fully consonant with his Gospel? I have said before, that things *morally* good are attainable by the natural man; but things *spiritually* good are altogether out of his reach. *Only keep in mind this important distinction*, and no language that can be used can be too strong to declare our destitution of all good, and our dependence upon God for every good disposition or desire — — —]

2. What matter there is for encouragement—

[Was Paul's sufficiency derived from God alone? Then I also may obtain all that I need. Since the same source and fountain is open for *me* also, why need I be discouraged at the thought of my own impotency? If God, in instances without number, "has revealed unto babes what he has hidden from the wise and prudent^a," and "by things which are not, has brought to nought things that are^b," what need have I to be discouraged? Whatever be my duties, whether personal or official, God can strengthen me for them; yea, and "he will perfect his own strength in my weakness^c." "I will be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might^d," and address myself to every duty in dependence on him. Then shall I not fail in any thing that I undertake: for "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me^e."]

^y Phil. ii. 13.

^z John xv. 5.

^a Matt. xi. 25.

^b 1 Cor. i. 28.

^c 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^d Eph. vi. 10.

^e Phil. iv. 13.

MMVII.

THE LETTER THAT KILLETH, AND THE SPIRIT THAT GIVETH LIFE.

2 Cor. iii. 6. *Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

IN the Holy Scriptures there is often incidentally introduced some information of the deepest and most important nature, where the subject did not immediately appear to call for it. In a parenthesis, as it were, a world of instruction is often conveyed. The fact is, that the inspired writers, and especially St. Paul, had so full an insight into the mysteries of our holy religion, that they spake of them as persons familiar with the truths they uttered, and scarcely conscious, as it were, of the depths into which they so abruptly led the minds of their readers. St. Paul, vindicating himself against a supposed charge of egotism and of boasting, here acknowledges, that "all his sufficiency, for every part of his ministerial duty^a," was of God. But, together with this, he gives, in few words, his entire view of the Gospel which he preached, and of the effects which he expected to follow from his labours. To set before you the precise import of his words, I will shew,

I. What is that Gospel which we minister—

St. Paul calls himself "a minister of the new testament," or, as the word also means, "the new covenant:" and, for the purpose of explaining himself more clearly, he contrasts that new covenant with the old covenant, which was superseded by it.

His view of the Gospel may be thus explained—

[The old covenant, as published by Moses, was written in ten commandments, upon tables of stone. The substance of those ten commandments is by our Lord comprised in two: the one of which is, "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength;" and the other, "Thou shalt

^a This is the precise idea, not of the context only, but of the text itself. See the Greek.

love thy neighbour as thyself." For the performance of these commandments the law afforded no strength, whilst yet it made no allowance whatever for the smallest defect in our obedience. The terms it prescribed were plain and positive, "Do this, and live." On the other hand, it said, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Hence the Apostle calls this law, "The letter that killeth:" for though as given originally to Adam, "it was ordained to life," to his fallen descendants it has been found only "to death^b." Hence he calls it also "a ministration of death, and of condemnation^c," because nothing but condemnation and death can result from it to fallen man. So true is that declaration of his, that "as many as are under the law, are under the curse^d."

In opposition to this, the Gospel is set forth as "a new covenant," given to us to remedy the defects of the former covenant. In this new covenant a Saviour is provided for us; and the Holy Spirit also is promised to us, to effect in our hearts all that our necessities require. Are we blind? this blessed Spirit will enlighten us. Are we weak? He will give us strength. Are we polluted? He will sanctify us throughout: and thus will he impart to us all that the Saviour has obtained for us, even peace, and righteousness, and life. Hence the Apostle calls the Gospel, "the spirit that giveth life;" and represents the ministration of it as "a ministration of the spirit, and of righteousness^e."

In the Epistle to the Hebrews this contrast is more fully opened: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt*: . . . for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more^f." Here, then, the defects of the former covenant are completely supplied. The law issued commands without aid, and menaces without hope: but the Gospel offers a free pardon of all sin, and communicates strength for future obedience. Thus the one is "a letter which killeth;" the other is "a spirit, which giveth life."]

This is the Gospel which we also preach—

^b Rom. vii. 10.

^c ver. 7, 9.

^d Gal. iii. 10.

^e ver. 8, 9.

^f Heb. viii. 8—12.

[We are careful to* distinguish between the two covenants; well knowing, that all who remain under the former covenant must perish; and that there is no salvation for any man, but on the terms prescribed by the new covenant, the covenant of grace. In accordance with this, it is our constant labour to mark the danger of trusting to any works of righteousness which we can perform, and to shew the indispensable necessity of looking to Christ as “all our salvation and all our desire.” In a word, St. Paul’s views, as declared by himself, are those which we endeavour both to adopt and follow. He says, “Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That he that doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise . . . The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: THAT IS, THE WORD OF FAITH WHICH WE PREACH; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, (and consequently, that he is the promised Messiah,) thou shalt be saved. For *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness*; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture saith, *Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed*^g.”]

Having thus declared what the Gospel is which we preach, let me also declare,

II. What we look for as the fruit of our ministrations—

St. Paul had spoken of himself “as a savour of life unto life” and salvation to many^h. And this is what we also hope to be, and what we aim at in all our ministrations. We hope, and, so far as God shall render our word effectual, expect,

1. To deliver you from all legal bondage—

[Every man by nature is under the law, and expects to be saved by his obedience to it. Hence arise those self-denying efforts which unenlightened heathens make to commend themselves to their deities; and hence also spring those laborious exertions which Christians of a Pharisaic cast put forth to purchase the favour of the Most High. But, however much they labour, they cannot attain solid peace. There always remains upon their mind, as well there may, a doubt, whether they have done enough to purchase the remission of their sins, and enough also to secure a title to heaven. Hence they spend their days in a state of bondage, labouring incessantly to

^g Rom. x. 5—11.

^h 2 Cor. ii. 16.

acquire such a measure of righteousness as shall serve as a foundation of hope, and yet are unable so to satisfy their conscience as to find peace in their souls. But, in bringing before you the new covenant, we shew that you may dismiss all your fears, and indulge a better hope; since the Lord Jesus Christ has suffered for your sins, and has wrought out a righteousness wherein you may stand accepted before God. Thus you may be brought at once into the condition of a prisoner, who, having been long shut up under a state of condemnation, has at last had his pardon sealed, and is permitted to live free from all fear or painful restraint.]

2. To bring you into perfect liberty—

[A mere hope of pardon is by no means the full extent of the mercy accorded to us under the new covenant. There is a perfect peace, into which they are introduced who believe in Christ; yea, they possess “a joy unspeakable and glorified.” The Spirit of God is to the believer a Comforter, who “sheds abroad the love of God in his heart,” and “seals him unto the day of his final redemption.” O, who can declare the full liberty of the children of God; the sweet confidence which they have in God; and the exquisite delight they feel in communion with him? Who can adequately declare the foretastes which they enjoy of their heavenly inheritance? Now, to these blessings we hope to introduce you: nor do we ever consider our ministry as fully answering the ends which God has ordained, till we see you “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God;” and longing to be dissolved, that you may be with Christ. “Wherever the Gospel has its proper work, there is the liberty” which I have here describedⁱ.]

3. To effect in you such a change as shall commend our doctrine to the whole world by your life and conversation—

[No other “commendation” do we desire either to you or from you^k. Applaud us as much as you please, and we shall regard *that* as, at best, a very doubtful evidence of our real usefulness. But let us see you changed both in heart and life; let us see you so changed, as to be “epistles of Christ, known and read of all men;” and we shall desire no better testimony, either from God or man. If we see “you crucified to the world by the cross of Christ;” if we behold you dedicating yourselves to the service of your God, and “renewed after his image in righteousness and true holiness;” if your spirit and temper in your families; your meekness, your gentleness, your patience, your forbearance, and your conformity

ⁱ Cite ver. 17.

^k ver. 1.

to "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," be visible to all around you; *that, that* is the object which we aim at; that so, if our doctrine be condemned, we may challenge the world to produce such effects wrought by any other means than those which we use,—an exhibition of "Christ crucified," and an unqualified offer of salvation to all who will believe in him.]

APPLICATION—

1. Inquire, then, I pray you, what reception you have given to this Gospel—

[It is not a mere outward approbation of it that will suffice. You must embrace it with your whole souls. You must "be delivered into it, as into a mould¹;" and assume the features of it, in every part of your character and conversation. There is found in many a very considerable change, as wrought by legal doctrines. The Pharisees of old were very abundant in outward acts of righteousness: but their services were altogether performed on self-righteous principles, and not from love; and were wrought for their own glory, and not for the glory of their God. But you must render a far higher obedience: for you "are delivered from the law; that being dead wherein you were held;" and therefore you are expected to "serve God *in newness of spirit*, and not *in the oldness of the letter^m*." The works which proceed from self-righteous principles are such as please *men*: but those which are expected from you, will please God only: they proceed from the heart; and they alone prove you to be Christians indeed: as God has said, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, *in the spirit*, and *not in the letter*; whose praise is not of men, but of Godⁿ."]]

2. Beg of God a blessing on our ministrations—

[It is God alone who can instruct ministers to proclaim his Gospel; as St. Paul has said in my text: "Our sufficiency is of God, who has made us able ministers of the new testament." Hence St. Paul so often entreated his brethren to "pray for him, that utterance might be given him to speak truly and faithfully, as he ought to speak." And it is God alone who can render the word effectual for the good of those who hear it. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, to no purpose, unless God himself shall give an increase." Pray, then, that the word may come to you, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance:" for it will then only be profitable to your souls, when "it comes to you in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."]

¹ Rom. vi. 17. The Greek. ^m Rom. vii. 6. ⁿ Rom. ii. 29.

MMVIII.

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL COMPARED.

2 Cor. iii. 6. *The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

THE Gospel is that weapon, whereby God subdues a rebellious world to the obedience of faith: and the Apostle Paul, when his commission to preach it was called in question, appealed to the effects wrought by it on the hearts of his hearers, as a decisive evidence that he was sent of God to proclaim it, and that the word he preached was the true Gospel. But, though constrained thus to vindicate his apostolic character, he would not arrogate to himself any praise, as though the work had been wrought by any wisdom or power of his own: he disclaimed "all power even to think a good thought," and much more to produce such a wonderful change on the hearts of others: this change was effected by a simple exhibition of Gospel truth; yet not by the mere promulgation of it as a record, but by a representation of it as God's appointed instrument to save the world. In this respect, his ministry differed widely from that of the priests under the Law, and from that of the false teachers under the Gospel: for both the one and the other of those, resting in externals, betrayed their hearers to their ruin; whereas he, by setting forth the true Gospel according to its spiritual import, was instrumental to their salvation: "He was a minister of the new testament," not of the letter, but of the spirit: for, says he, "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

How any revelation from God should have the effect of "killing" those to whom it was given, and, more especially, how the new testament should be attended with any such consequences, does, it must be confessed, at first sight appear strange and incredible. But the Apostle's declaration is true: "the letter does kill; and the spirit alone makes alive." This will be seen,

I. By contrasting the new testament with the old—

The old-testament dispensation had no power to give life—

[The Law, as given to man in Paradise, was undoubtedly “ordained unto life:” and was capable of giving him life, if he had continued obedient to it: but to *fallen* man it never has been, or can be, a source of life.

Its commands are such as *fallen* man cannot obey. It requires us to “love God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength, and our neighbour as ourselves.” But who can do this? Who, except the Lord Jesus Christ himself, has not failed in some particular?

At the same time that its commands are so difficult, it affords no strength whatever for the performance of them. It simply says, Do this, and live: but it contains no promise of assistance for the doing of it, nor any intimation of pardon for one single act of disobedience.

It moreover enforces its commands with a most awful sanction, denouncing “a curse against every man who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them:” so that if there be in our obedience no absolute dereliction of duty, but only a defect; and if that defect be of the slightest kind, and occur only once in the whole course of our lives; the penalty instantly attaches to us, and is irreversibly denounced against us^a.

Thus, *in itself*, the law is, as the Apostle justly calls it, “a ministration only of death and of condemnation^b.”

But, *in the manner in which it is promulgated*, it has yet a further tendency to “kill.” For it is promulgated now exactly as it was in Paradise: and there is no notice given in the decalogue that we are not to trust in it for acceptance: so that a person who does not inquire diligently into the design of God in giving it, is but too likely to misapprehend its real use, and to *rest in it, instead of looking out for some other law* in which he may rest.

Further, the ceremonial law also has, through the ignorance of man, the same tendency to “kill” those who are placed under it. For, whilst it prescribes certain observances, as means of expiating transgression, it gives no direct information concerning the precise nature and extent of the remission obtained by them: so that a person performing the appointed ordinances would be likely to conceive that his sins were actually pardoned in the sight of God; whilst, in reality, the annual repetition of the same sacrifices might teach him that they were not completely and finally forgiven^c.

^a Gal. iii. 10.

^b ver. 7, 9.

^c Heb. x. 1—4.

The truth is, that neither the moral nor ceremonial law was given for the purpose of enabling any one to obtain, by means of it, a justifying righteousness. They were both given with a view to prepare men for that better dispensation which was in due time to be introduced; *the moral law shutting them up* under condemnation; and *the ceremonial law opening to them a door*, whereby they might find access to that better dispensation, which should in due time be revealed^d.

It will naturally, then, be asked, 'Did the legal dispensation actually "kill" all who lived under it?' I answer, God forbid. There were multitudes saved under that dispensation; not, however, through any influence of the law itself, but by looking forward to the Gospel, and by apprehending that Saviour who was held forth to them in their types and shadows. "Abraham by faith beheld the day of Christ, and rejoiced;" and so did thousands of his believing posterity. The giving of the law made no difference in that respect. The use of the law was to shew men their need of a better dispensation, and to prepare them for it; that, when the time for the full manifestation of the Gospel should arrive, the Saviour might be welcomed by his own people, and the whole world be made partakers of his salvation^e.]

The office of giving life was reserved for the Gospel—

[The Gospel contains the substance, of which the law was the shadow. The *commands* of the Gospel are different: the law says, "*Do*:" the Gospel says, "*Believe*." The *promises* of the Gospel are different. Under the law no mention was made of spiritual assistance to any one: but under the Gospel, the Spirit is promised to every believer^g: and "grace sufficient for him," how great soever his necessities may be^h. In fact, the Gospel provides a remedy for every want of man. Is he guilty? it provides a righteousness wherein he may stand faultless in the presence of his God, even the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is he a polluted creature? it provides, that through the operations of the Holy Spirit he shall "be sanctified wholly in body, soul, and spirit." However weak he may be in himself, "God's strength shall be perfected in his weakness;" so that he may boldly say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." Is he deserving of the lowest hell? by embracing this Gospel he shall obtain all the glory and felicity of heaven.]

If it be asked, Whether the Gospel produces this

^d Gal. iii. 21—24.

^e Gal. iii. 19.

^f Rom. x. 5—13.

^g Acts ii. 38, 39.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 9.

effect on all to whom it is sent? I must answer, No: and this will lead me to make distinctions in reference to the Gospel itself,

II. By contrasting the new testament as externally administered, with the same as internally and spiritually received—

The new testament itself, *as a letter*, has no other effect than that of “killing” those to whom it is proclaimed—

[The new-testament dispensation is, in its very nature, calculated to offend the pride of man, and to prove a stumbling-block to the unhumiliated spirit. It was declared, by the Prophet Isaiah, that it should be so: “Sanctify,” says he, “the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread: and he shall be to you for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be takenⁱ.” And when the Saviour came into the world, the holy man, who took him up in his arms, declared, that “he was set no less *for the fall* than for the rising again of many in Israel^k.” And did not the event correspond with these predictions? St. Peter tells us, that, whilst “to some he was precious, to others he was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, even to those who *stumbled at the word*, being disobedient^l.” It was from foreseeing these effects, that our blessed Lord gave that solemn caution to his hearers, “Blessed is he that shall not be offended in me^m.” If it be thought that this offence arose only from *his person*, as appearing in a low and degraded state, I answer, that it arose from the entire constitution of the Gospel altogether. The whole doctrine of salvation by “the cross of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishnessⁿ.” The Jews could not conceive how the Mosaic law should be superseded, and how they should be required to look for salvation otherwise than by their obedience to it: and the Greeks thought it perfectly absurd to expect salvation from one, who, in appearance, was not able to save himself. So, at this day, thousands who hear the Gospel are offended at being told that they must renounce all dependence on their own works, and be saved simply by faith in Christ. They cannot comprehend how we are to be dead to the law as a covenant, and yet alive to it as a rule of life: and the being saved entirely

ⁱ Isai. viii. 13—15.

^k Luke ii. 34.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

^m Matt. xi. 6.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 23.

by the righteousness of another appears to supersede all occasion for any righteousness of their own. They can see no more suitableness or sufficiency in *such* a Gospel, than Naaman could see in the direction given him to wash in Jordan in order to cure his leprosy.

Thus, in the very constitution of the Gospel, there is much which has a tendency to kill those who are not of a humble mind.

But the Gospel is thus fatal, not only to those who *reject* it, but to many, also, who *imagine that they have received* it. For, through the corruption of the human heart, the very principles of the Gospel are themselves often perverted; so that even "the grace of God is turned into lasciviousness," and "Christ himself is made a minister of sin." This was the case with some in the apostolic age: and it is the case with some at this time also. There are at the present day some who so embrace the *letter* of the Gospel, as altogether to overlook its *spirit*; and who so glory in a salvation *finished* for them, as to disregard the salvation that remains to be *accomplished* in them: and thus they take occasion, from the freeness and fulness of the Gospel salvation, to represent all demands of labour and watchfulness on their part as *legal*: and because God has undertaken to work in them both to will and to do his will, they cannot see any necessity for them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Thus, I say, some take occasion, even from the *promises*, to rest satisfied without attaining the things promised.

But, besides these, there are others, who take occasion from the *precepts* of the Gospel, to make their obedience to them a joint ground of their hope. They see rewards promised to obedience; and they know not how to distinguish between a reward of *grace*, and a reward of *debt*; or between that which forms their *justifying* righteousness before God, and that which shall be *approved* in those who are already justified. Thus, by uniting their own righteousness with that of Christ, they make void all that Christ has done, and perish without any interest in his salvation.

Thus even the new testament, as externally administered, but not rightly and vitally apprehended, may "kill," no less than the law itself. And so St. Paul has told us, that the word which he preached, whilst "to some it was made a savour of life unto life, became to others a savour of death unto death."]

But, when internally and spiritually received, it "giveth life"—

[To some “the word comes, not in word only, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:” and to them it is a source of life. It conveys to them a new and vital principle, whereby they are enabled to live unto their God: or, as the Scripture expresses it, “they, by means of it, are made partakers of a divine nature,” and “have all things given them that pertain unto life and godliness.” They now, from their own experience, know the meaning of that declaration of our Lord, “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die^p.” Their whole conduct now evinces the change that has been wrought in them. Being quickened from the dead, they henceforth “live no more unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again.” And now they can look forward to the eternal state with sweet assured confidence, that, “because their Saviour lives, they shall live also;” and that “when He, who is their life, shall appear, they also shall appear with him in glory.”]

LEARN, then, from hence,

1. What the hearers of the Gospel should more especially guard against—

[Of those who hear the Gospel, many think, that if they receive the truths of Christianity into their minds, so as to be orthodox in their sentiments, they have no need of any thing further to make them partakers of its benefits. But God forbid that any of you, brethren, should be left under any such delusion. You must not be satisfied with hearing the truth, but must consider “*how* you hear it;” whether you give merely a speculative assent to it; or whether you receive it into your hearts, as the ground of all your hopes, and as the well-spring of all your joys. Dearly beloved, it is for this end that, as “a minister of the new testament,” I would impress on your minds the truths which I declare. And, if at any time I manifest a jealousy over you in relation to these matters, know, that, it is not an uncharitable, but “a godly, jealousy;” which I am bound to exercise over you for your good. I am bound to “stand in doubt of you, till I can see Christ formed in your hearts,” the hope of glory. Concur then with me in this important work. Bear in mind that you are in danger, even from the Gospel itself; in danger of deceiving your own souls by means of it; and of causing “that which is ordained to life, to be found at last unto death.” You may possibly delight in the ministry of the word, like

Ezekiel's hearers; who came to him, just as those who were truly pious did; and he was to them as "a very lovely song of one that had a pleasant voice, and played well upon an instrument: but though they heard his words, they would not do them; for their heart went after their covetousness^a." Beware, lest by any means the Gospel prove but a dead letter: for if it bring not your whole soul into captivity to Christ, it will be preached, as it respects you, in vain. Beware, I say, of this: for our Lord himself gives you this very caution; "It is the spirit," says he, "that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life^r."]

2. What fruit a minister expects to find from his labours—

[The Apostle spoke of the Corinthians themselves as bearing the best testimony to his ministrations: and that is the return which we hope to receive from you. Beloved brethren, you yourselves are to be as "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men." Let it be seen that you are such indeed; that you are "epistles, written, not with pen and ink, but with the Spirit of the living God^s." The Gospel, whilst it saves you from condemnation, must save you also from sin; and, whilst you are "delivered by it from the law, as a covenant of works, you are to be serving God, *in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter^t*." Let us, then, behold this change in you: let us see that "the Son of God hath made you free indeed;" free from carnal desires; free from legal hopes or fears; free to run, with enlarged hearts, the way of God's commandments. Then shall we know that we have not laboured in vain; and that God has set his seal to our ministry for your good: for "he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God^u."]

^a Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^r John vi. 63.

^s ver. 2, 3.

^t Rom. vii. 6.

^u Rom. ii. 28, 29.

MMIX.

THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL ABOVE THAT OF THE LAW.

2 Cor. iii. 7—11. *If the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory*

of his countenance ; which glory was to be done away : how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious ? for if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

THE Apostle, in vindicating his claim to apostolic authority against the false teachers at Corinth who disputed it, appeals to the Corinthians themselves as proofs and evidences of his divine mission ; since the work of God upon their hearts abundantly manifested, that his ministrations among them had been attended with a power more than human^a. In thus substantiating his title to apostolic authority, he is led, incidentally as it were, to mention the excellency of that Gospel which he was sent to preach ; and from thence to shew, that the deference due to him was the greater, in proportion to the excellency of the Gospel which he ministered unto them. Honourable as the state of the Levitical priesthood was, it was not to be compared with that of those who preached the Gospel ; because the law, as ministered in the “letter” of it, proved fatal to all who trusted in it ; whereas the Gospel was a source of “life” to all who cordially embraced it : the one, as a mere “letter, killed ;” the other, as a quickening “spirit, gave life^b.”

The Apostle, having touched upon this point, proceeds to open it more fully in the words which we have just read : for the fuller understanding of which we shall consider,

I. The different terms by which the law and the Gospel are here designated—

The law is called “the ministration of death and of condemnation.”

[The law as given to Adam in Paradise “was ordained to life,” and would have entitled him to life if he had continued obedient to it^c: but, as republished by Moses, it was never

^a ver. 2, 3, 5. with 1 Cor. ix. 2.

^b ver. 6.

^c Rom. vii. 10.

intended to give man any title to life; nor could it possibly give life, because every human being is corrupt, and incapable of rendering to it a perfect obedience^d. The law is a perfect transcript of God's mind and will. It makes known to man the whole extent of his duty; and requires a perfect obedience to every one of its commands. If transgressed in any one particular, it denounces death: it says to every soul of man, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." At the same time that it thus rigorously exacts a perfect obedience, it neither imparts to man any strength for obedience, nor provides any remedy for one single act of disobedience: and hence it is called in our text, "a ministration of death and of condemnation." Its voice to all is, "Do this and live: transgress, and perish." But as every man has transgressed it, and consequently can never do all that it commands, it consigns to death every child of man, according as St. Paul has said; "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written *Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them*^e." We must not desire to do them, but "*do*" them; not some, but "*all*;" not for a time, but for a "*continuance*," from the first to the last moment of our lives: nor is there any exception in favour of any child of man; for "*every one*" must stand or fall, be saved or "*cursed*," according to this law; and consequently, every man being of necessity born under this law, "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God^f."]

The Gospel is called "a ministration of righteousness and of the Spirit"—

[The law condemning all, the Gospel applies a remedy: it reveals a Saviour, who, by his own obedience unto death, has "made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in an everlasting righteousness^g." This righteousness is revealed to us in the Gospel to be apprehended by faith^h; and it is actually given "unto," and put "upon," "all who believe" in Jesusⁱ. This righteousness is totally independent of any obedience to the law on our part: it exists in Christ alone, and is imputed unto us by faith^k: and, so far from being augmented by any works of ours, it would be made void by the smallest dependence on our own works^l; and we must renounce all hope in ourselves, before we can have any part or lot in the righteousness of Christ^m. Hence the Gospel is called "a ministration of righteousness," because it reveals a righteousness commen-

^d Gal. iii. 21. with Rom. viii. 3.

^e Gal. iii. 10.

^f Rom. iii. 19.

^g Dan. ix. 24.

^h Rom. i. 17.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 21, 22.

^k Rom. iv. 5, 6.

^l Gal. ii. 21. and v. 4.

^m Phil. iii. 9.

surate with all the demands of the law, and offers that righteousness to every man who will believe in Christ. It declares that "Christ himself is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believethⁿ;" and that the law was given as a ministration of death on purpose to shut men up to this righteousness, and to constrain them to seek salvation in the way provided for them^o.

The Gospel is also "the ministration of the Spirit." In the first ages, the Spirit was given in his miraculous powers to attest the truth and Divine authority of the Gospel. That end having been fully answered, his miraculous powers are no longer exercised: but his gracious influences still continue, and will continue to the end of time. Still is he sent "to convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" still it is his office "to glorify Christ," and to "take of the things that are Christ's, and to shew them unto us:" still does he enlighten the minds, and sanctify the souls, of them that believe: still does he, as the Comforter promised to the Church, operate in the saints as "a Spirit of adoption," "witnessing with their spirits that they are the children of God," and "sealing them unto the day of redemption." To none is he imparted for these ends but through the Gospel of Christ; and, wherever the Gospel is faithfully ministered, he does accompany it with these blessed influences; producing holiness and comfort in all who truly receive it.

Thus the Gospel supplies what the law knew nothing of. We have before said, that the law spake nothing of pardon to the guilty, or of strength to the weak: but the Gospel administers both; and *that* too in such an abundant measure, as is adequate to the necessities of the whole world: it ministers righteousness sufficient to justify the most guilty sinner upon earth; and imparts the Spirit, so that the weakest may be more than conqueror over all the enemies of his soul.]

Corresponding with this description of the law and of the Gospel were,

II. The different degrees of glory pertaining to each—

The law was truly glorious—

[It was proclaimed by God himself with an audible voice in the midst of such displays of glory as had never been seen from the foundation of the world: and, that it might never be forgotten, it was written also by the finger of God in tables of stone. Moreover, the person through whom it was given to Israel, had such glory imparted to him, that the people of Israel were no more able to look steadfastly upon his face, than

ⁿ Rom. x. 4.

^o Gal. iii. 22, 23.

upon the face of the meridian sun. Whilst this reflected a very high degree of glory upon the law itself, it was especially intended to intimate to all Israel, that they were unable to apprehend the full scope and meaning of the law^p! They thought it a covenant whereby they were to obtain acceptance with God; whereas it had an infinitely higher office, even that of "a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, that they might be justified by faith^q." But this, which was its chief glory, they were not able to discern: and, in consequence of their ignorance of its true meaning, they supposed it to be of everlasting obligation; whereas it was, together with all its attendant rites and ceremonies, to continue only till Christ should come, and then to give way to a more perfect dispensation. Still, however, when all the circumstances attending its promulgation are considered, it was certainly exceeding glorious.]

But the Gospel was far more glorious—

[As imparting life, it must of necessity be far more glorious than that which only occasioned death: for the law did really occasion death; inasmuch as, if there had been no law, there would have been no transgression, and consequently neither sin nor death^r. In revealing such a way of salvation too, it is inconceivably glorious. How mysterious is that record, "that God hath given unto us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: that whoso hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life^s:" and finally, that "he was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we, who had no righteousness, might be made the righteousness of God in him^t!" Well is this called, "The glorious Gospel of the blessed God!" for in it are "riches" of love that are altogether "unsearchable," and heights and depths that can never be explored.

That the Gospel too transforms the soul into the Divine image is another ground of excellence, which exalts it infinitely above the law. The law rather irritates and inflames the corrupt principle within us, than tends at all to the subjugation of it^u; but the Gospel both frees us from the dominion of sin, and liberates us from all its penal consequences: "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes us free from the law of sin and death^x."

The Gospel too, as being God's last dispensation, will endure for ever; whilst the law, which was only introductory to it, is altogether abolished. So that in this respect also its superiority to the law is great and indisputable.

Compare the two then, and see the difference between them:

^p ver. 13.

^q Gal. iii. 24.

^r Rom. iv. 15. and v. 13. and 1 John iii. 4. ^s 1 John v. 11, 12.

^t 2 Cor. v. 21.

^u Rom. vii. 5, 8.

^x Rom. viii. 2.

the lustre imparted by the one was external, on the face of Moses; the change wrought by the other is internal, in the heart and in the soul. In the one, the radiance shone from one only; in the other, it is conferred on all who believe. In the one, it passed away quickly; in the other, it is abiding, even to the end of life, and through eternal ages. In the one, it was to be veiled from the sight of all; in the other, it is to be displayed for the instruction of all, that all may see in it the hand of God^y, and learn to glorify its Divine Author^z. Well then may it be said, that “that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth:” for in truth, though the law shone like the starry heavens in the brightest night, the Gospel, like the meridian sun, has eclipsed its splendour, and cast a veil over all its glory.]

Let not this however be with us a matter of speculation only: let us consider,

III. The conduct which our superior dispensation demands—And,

1. Of ministers—

[The influence which these considerations had upon the Apostle was, to make him “use great plainness of speech.” He would not, like Moses, “put a veil upon his face,” to conceal any part of the splendour of this Gospel^a; but would preach it with all fidelity, and, by the fullest possible “manifestation of it, commend himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God^b.” This then is what we must do; and what, through grace, it is our delight to do. Yes, brethren, we declare to you freely that the law, as a covenant of works, is abrogated; and a new covenant, with a better Mediator, and with better promises, is proposed to you in the Gospel. This new covenant provides, as you have heard, righteousness for the guilty, and strength for the weak; and authorizes every believer to say, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^c.” O that we might be instrumental to the bringing you into a near and full acquaintance with this better dispensation! Never would we forget that our one great office is, to make it known to you, and to bring you to the enjoyment of all its blessings. We would go up to the holy mount ourselves to receive it from God, and we would come down with it in our hands and in our hearts to proclaim it to you^d. We do proclaim it to you at this moment: we do declare to you, that the most guilty sinner in the universe may now find

^y ver. 2, 3.

^z Matt. v. 16.

^a ver. 12, 13.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 2.

^c Isai. xlv. 24.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 3. 1 John i. 1—3.

acceptance with God through the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ: and we declare also, that a new heart shall be given you, and a new spirit shall be put within you, and the whole law of God be written in your hearts, if only you will believe in him: for he will send down his Holy Spirit upon you, according to his promise, and, by his gracious influences upon your souls, will "cause you to keep his statutes and his judgments^e." All this shall be "ministered unto you abundantly through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," if only you will come unto him; and it shall be given you "freely, without money and without price" — — —]

2. Of the Church at large—

[Your minds should be intent on this great subject: you should seek to grow daily in the knowledge of it: you should come up to the house of God with the same preparation of heart to receive the word of God from your ministers, as the Israelites did to receive the law from the hands of Moses: your state of mind should be like to that of Cornelius and his company, when Peter came to preach the tidings of salvation to them; "Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God^f." And as there is no veil put before our face, so you should beg of God that no veil may remain on your hearts. The law was hid from Israel without involving them in any guilt or danger, if only they complied with it as far as it was revealed to them: but "if the Gospel be hid from you, you must eternally perish^g;" because it is the only possible way of salvation, and can save only by operating effectually both on the understanding and the heart^h. O then beg of God to counteract the devices of Satan, who strives continually to hide this Gospel from you; and entreat him "to shine into your hearts to give you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christⁱ!"

At the same time you must remember, that in this respect the obedience you pay must correspond with the privileges you enjoy. Being liberated from the law, you are released also from all servile hopes and fears: and your service must be no longer that of a slave, but of a child: you must serve God, not in the oldness of the letter, but in newness of the spirit^k; and in this way you will attain all the blessings which the Gospel is intended to impart. The intent of this Gospel is, to assimilate you to that Saviour who proclaims it to you. Whilst you receive it from him, a portion of his splendour must cleave

^e Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^f Acts x. 33.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^h 1 Thess. ii. 13.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iv. 4, 6. ^k Rom. vii. 6.

unto you, so that all who behold you may see of a truth that you have been with Jesus. You must be "his epistles" to an ungodly world: and so plain must be the characters written on your heart and life, that they may be "known and read of all men." Daily must this writing be more visible; and daily shall the radiance around you increase, if you live near to the Lord, contemplating continually the wonders of his love: for, "if with unveiled face you behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, you shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord"¹— — —]

¹ ver. 18.

MMX.

THE FUTURE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS.

2 Cor. iii. 15, 16. *Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away^a.*

THERE is confessedly much obscurity in different parts of the sacred volume: even in St. Paul's writings there are, as St. Peter tells us, "some things hard to be understood." And this is no more than might well be expected, considering the depth of the subjects treated of, even all the hidden counsels of the Almighty, and the necessary ambiguity of prophetic language, in order to conceal the purposes of the Deity, till the prophecies should be unravelled by subsequent events. Other difficulties arise out of errors, which in the course of so many hundred years have, through the inadvertence of transcribers, crept into different copies of the Holy Scriptures. But, after all, the chief source of obscurity is, the veil that is on the heart of man, (the veil of prejudice, and ignorance, and unbelief,) which conceals from unconverted men even the plainest truths. To intimate the existence of such a veil, was one of the reasons for Moses putting a veil over his face when he came

^a An equally good text for this would be, Exod. xxxiv. 33, 34. "Till Moses had done speaking to *them*, he put a veil on his face. But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with *him*, he took the veil off until he came out."

down from the holy mount with the tables of the law in his hands. He intimated thereby, that the children of Israel could not look to the end of that which was to be abolished ; that is, that they could not comprehend the nature of the dispensation which he was commissioned to establish ; seeing that there was a veil upon their hearts, “ by which *their minds were blinded^b*.” That veil remained on their hearts during the whole of that dispensation ; and, notwithstanding “ it is done away in Christ,” so that, if they were disposed to avail themselves of the light which Christianity reflects on their inspired writings, they might now acquire a clear insight into them, “ the veil yet remains on their hearts even unto this day.” But it shall not be always so : there is a time coming, “ when that infatuated nation shall turn unto the Lord ; and then the veil shall be taken away.”

To enter fully into this subject, we must distinctly mark what was intimated by his *putting on* the veil to speak with *them*, and his *putting off* the veil to speak with *the Lord*.

I. His putting on the veil was designed to shew their present blindness—

Truly there is a veil, a thick veil, upon their hearts ; so that to this day they cannot see,

1. The scope and intent of the Mosaic dispensation—

[The Mosaic dispensation was partly legal, partly evangelical, and partly a national covenant, relating only to the temporal state of the Jewish people. *The law of the ten commandments* was a re-publication of the law originally written upon the heart of man, by an obedience to which our first parents were to obtain eternal life. *The ceremonial observances* were appointed to shadow forth the salvation offered to us in the Gospel, and to prepare the minds of the Jews for the Messiah, who should in due time be sent to fulfil all that was required by the moral law, and all that was shadowed forth in the ceremonial. The moral law was not given them in order that they might seek justification by it ; but in order to shew them, that it was impossible for fallen man ever to be justified

by it, and that, as transgressors, they must look for salvation solely by faith in the promised Messiah. But of these things they had no idea: they could see nothing in the whole dispensation but a covenant made with them as God's peculiar people; by an obedience to which, according to the mere letter of it, they supposed that they should obtain all the blessings both of time and eternity. And this is the notion which has been entertained by them in all successive ages even to the present day. Notwithstanding it is impossible for them now, by reason of their dispersion, to obey their ceremonial law, they still suppose that they are to be saved by their own obedience. They have no idea of the atonement that has been offered for them, or of the righteousness that has been wrought out for them, by Christ's obedience unto death: they cannot raise their minds above a compliance with certain rites (many of them appointed by man only, and substituted in the place of those which were appointed of God), and an external conformity with the mere letter of the moral law: like Paul, in his unconverted state, if they have been kept from any gross violations of their law, they account themselves "blameless;" and if they have transgressed their law in ever so great a degree, they have no conception of any thing but their repentance and reformation to re-instate them in the Divine favour. They will indeed speak of their Messiah whom they expect, and in whom they profess a kind of confidence; but they have no definite idea of what he is to do for them, or in what way he is to recommend them to God. They know nothing of "*the law as a ministration of death and of condemnation,*" nor do they know any thing of "*Christ as the end of the law for righteousness* to those who believe in him." In a word, they know nothing of *their ceremonial law as completed in him* nor of *their moral law as shutting them up to him*: but they stand fully on their own obedience, interpreting the promises, which related only to their continuance in Canaan, as the ground on which they look for eternal life. Thus, though following after righteousness, and in some instances with considerable zeal, they neither do, nor can, attain to it, because they cleave to the law as the ground of their hopes, and make a stumbling-block of that stone, which is the only foundation on which a sinner can ever stand before God^c.]

2. The true meaning of their prophecies—

[They do not see that *chain* of prophecy, commencing with the promise of "the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head," and gradually proceeding through all successive ages, with ever increasing clearness and precision,

^c Rom. ix. 31—33. and x. 2, 3.

till it terminated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In this respect the Jews of later ages are blinder than their forefathers. The Jews previous to the coming of Christ did so far understand the prophecies, that they knew of what tribe the Messiah was to be born, and what was to be the place of his nativity : they knew also, that the various prophecies which were cited by our Lord and his Apostles were cited according to their true import : for we do not find them on any one occasion controverting the application of those passages to the promised Messiah. But Jews of later ages, seeing how demonstrably those passages prove the Messiahship of Jesus, have resorted to other interpretations, in order to weaken the force of the arguments with which they are pressed. Even the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which seems to defy the ingenuity of man to pervert it, is explained away by them as not relating to the Messiah. The idea of a suffering Messiah they cannot bear : and they, who are constrained to confess that such an one is indisputably predicted in the prophecies, say that they shall have two Messiahs, one a suffering, and the other a triumphant, Messiah. As for all the prophecies that determined the time for the Messiah's advent, as to be before the departure of the sceptre from Judah, and during the existence of the second temple, they get over them by saying, that God did indeed intend to send the Messiah at that time ; but that he has deferred it these eighteen hundred years, and still defers it, on account of the wickedness of their nation. And the Messiah whom they expect is to be a mere temporal Prince, who shall subdue all their enemies, and make them in a temporal view the head of all nations.

Thus is there an impenetrable veil upon their hearts, as thick as that which was on the hearts of those who crucified the Lord of glory. We are told, that "their rulers at that time, not knowing the voices of the prophets which were read every Sabbath-day, fulfilled them in condemning him^d:" and the same is true of all the Rabbins at the present day. Even the Apostles themselves, after they had been instructed by their Divine Master for above three years, were still so blinded by the prejudices of their nation, that they could not admit the thought of a suffering Messiah, even when they were told of it by our Lord himself in the plainest terms^e : yea, even after his resurrection, they still dreamed of only a temporal Messiah^f. From *them*, through the tender mercy of their Lord, this veil was at length removed^g ; but on their unhappy countrymen it still remains, according to the predictions of the Prophet

^d Acts xiii. 27.^e Luke xviii. 31—34.^f Luke xxiv. 21. and Acts i. 6. ^g Luke xxiv. 25—27, 44—46.

Isaiah^h, as cited and explained by the Apostle Paulⁱ. And it is remarkable that, at particular seasons, the Jews, not excepting children of ten or twelve years of age, at this hour wear veils in their synagogues; a sad emblem of the veil which yet remains upon their hearts!]

But let us turn from this painful subject to observe, that,

II. His putting off the veil was designed to shew the manifestations that await them—

When Moses spake with the children of Israel, he put the veil on his face; but when he went in to speak with the Lord he took off the veil^k. However this, so far as his own feelings were concerned, might mark his humility, it covertly intimated to the Jews, that whilst they should converse only with men, and hearken to nothing but their own superstitions, the veil would remain on their hearts: but, “when once they should turn to the Lord their God,” to converse with him, and to seek instruction from him, “the veil that was on their hearts should be taken away.” So God promised them by Moses, at the very time that he foretold their present dispersion^l; and so it shall assuredly be in due season. In this respect their conversion will differ widely from the conversion of the heathen. The heathen, for want of previous instruction, will have their eyes gradually opened: the removal of the veil from their heart will do no more than give them a suitable disposition to receive the great truths of Christianity, which shall be subsequently set before them: but the Jews, being previously acquainted with their own law and with the writings of their prophets, will at once behold them all as centering in the Lord Jesus: their sight will be like that of a man, who, having been long conversant with the different wheels and springs of some complicated machine, (a steam-engine or a watch,) but never having had any notion of their relation to each other, and their harmonious adaptation to one common end, beholds them at once combined, and

^h Isai. xxix. 9, 10.

^k Exod. xxxiv. 33, 34.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 7, 8, 25.

^l Deut. iv. 26, 27, 30, 31.

in full activity : they will have glorious views of the Gospel salvation : they will behold, with an evidence brighter than the meridian sun,

1. Its truth and certainty—

[Being already to a certain degree conversant with their types and prophecies, though ignorant as to their true import, they will, as soon as the veil is removed from their hearts, be astonished to see how every particle of them is fulfilled in Christ : and such will be their conviction of his Messiahship, that they can no more doubt of it than Paul did, after the revelation which he received in his way to Damascus. The Scriptures will then appear to them like the impression of a seal on which are engraven ten thousand figures ; so clear and manifest will be the correspondence between the shadow and the substance, the type and the antitype. Their views of this will be incomparably clearer than those of Christians in general at this day : “The light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord shall bind up the breath of his people, and heal the stroke of their wound^m.”]

2. Its mysteriousness and sublimity—

[How “great will that mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,” appear to them, when they shall see, that that very Jesus, whom their fathers crucified, was indeed “the Lord of glory,” “Jehovah’s fellow,” “Emmanuel, God with us !” Then they will see, that every part of their ceremonial law was fulfilled and realized in him : that he was the true Temple, “in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily ;” the altar, which sanctifieth all our gifts ; the sacrifice, that taketh away the sins of the whole world ; the priest, that offered that sacrifice, and is gone with his own blood within the vail, and ever liveth there to make intercession for us. Then they will see why God *repeatedly* gave that particular command to Moses, “See thou make all things according to the pattern shewn to thee in the mount.” Every the minutest point that was revealed to Moses, portrayed something in the character of Christ ; so that, if any thing had been omitted, or added, or altered in any respect, the resemblance between the type and antitype would have failed, and God’s work would have been imperfect ; the edifice and the model would not have been alike. All the offices of Christ, as Prophet, Priest, and King, together with all that he should do in the execution of them, was there delineated : and, when the completion and concentration of them all shall be made manifest to them, with

^m Isai. xxx. 26.

what wonder and admiration will they exclaim, "O the depths both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

3. Its fulness and excellency—

[The contrast between the imperfection of their law and the perfect efficacy of the Gospel will in this respect be to them most delightful: their law was burthensome in the extreme; a yoke which they were not able to bear: but "Christ's yoke is easy, and his burthen light." Their observance of the appointed ceremonies brought them no solid peace: the very repetition of the same sacrifices shewed, that their sins were not fully removed: for indeed "it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin." Their sacrifices were, in fact, no more than a remembrance of sins yet unforgiven. But the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; "it purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God." Thus they will see, that, though "the law made nothing perfect, the bringing in of a better hope does:" "it perfects for ever all them that are sanctified." Now the veil of the temple (the body of the Lord Jesus) being rent in twain, they will find access into the holiest of all, every one for himself, and be emboldened to "cry, Abba, Father." Now they will see that they, without exception, are all kings and priests unto God and the Father, and are entitled to "an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading." O what joy will they experience, when they see the fulness of the provision made for them in Christ Jesus, and the freeness with which it is offered, even "without money and without price!" Truly when *they* are brought to look on him whom they have pierced, they will mourn and be in bitterness, as one that mourneth for his first-born; and the very instant they believe in him, they will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.]

Here then we may SEE,

1. What we should seek for ourselves—

[We must not imagine that there is a veil on the heart of Jews only; for there is one on the heart of Gentiles also, even of every child of man. Yes, we, who call ourselves Christians, are by nature blind as the Jews themselves. The veil that is *upon the Mosaic dispensation*, is indeed "done away in Christⁿ:" but the veil that is *on our hearts* is not done away: on the contrary, it is as visible upon us as upon any others of the human race. Look around and see how few are there who with unveiled face behold "the glory of God shining in the

ⁿ ver. 14.

face of Jesus Christ!" How few are so affected with a sight of Christ, as to be "changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord^o!" Are there not on every side myriads, who, like the Jews themselves, are looking for acceptance with God by a superstitious observance of ordinances, or, at best, by their own repentance and reformation; and who have no higher views of Christ than as purchasing for them a right and title to be their own saviours? Yes, such is the state of the generality amongst us: and those who glory in the cross of Christ, and walk faithfully in his steps, are at this day "for signs and for wonders," almost as much as they were in the days of the Prophet Isaiah^p. In every age, and in every place, they are but "a little flock," a mere "remnant," and it is only by the removal of the veil from their hearts that any can become of their happy number. Whatever advantages we may enjoy, it is "not flesh and blood that can reveal Christ unto us, but only our Father that is in heaven^q." If we have not "a spirit of wisdom and revelation given us for the enlightening of the eyes of our understanding," we shall continue in darkness, notwithstanding the true light shineth all around us^r. The Lord must open our hearts; or they will continue closed, even to our dying hour^s. Let us seek then to have the veil removed from our hearts, that the Gospel may not be hid from us. This is a blessing which God has promised to *us*, yes, to *us* sinners of the Gentiles^t: and, if we will turn to him, and seek him with our whole hearts, he will vouchsafe it unto us; and "bring us out of darkness into the marvellous light of his Gospel."]

2. What we should seek in behalf of our Jewish brethren.

[The removal of this veil is all that is wanting on their behalf. But many think it in vain to labour for this end: they seem to imagine that nothing but a miracle can effect so great a work. But why should it be more difficult with them than with others? Are not the Gentiles as blind as ever the Jews can be? Look at the worshippers of Mahomet, of Brahma, and Confucius, and see if they are not as blind and bigoted as the Jews themselves. What were our forefathers, when first the Gospel was preached to them? Were not they as far off from God as the Jews are at this day? Yet see what has been wrought by the Gospel in this happy land. People do not despair of the conversion of the most savage tribes of Africa and America: why then should we despair of seeing "the scales fall from the eyes" of Jews? Is not God as able

^o ver. 18.

^p Isai. viii. 18.

^q Matt. xvi. 16, 17.

^r Eph. i. 17, 18.

^s Acts xvi. 14.

^t Isai. xxv. 7.

to graff the Jews on their own stock again, as he was to graff in us? "If we who were cut out of the olive-tree, which is wild by nature, were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive-tree, how much more shall they who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive-tree^u?" It is impious to despair; because God himself has engaged to take the veil from them, the very moment they turn unto him. Let us then exhort them to turn to him, and to look to him for that direction which alone can prove effectual. Surely this is not such a hopeless task! We may not perhaps succeed so rapidly as we could wish in the first instance: but did the prophets suspend their labours because Isaiah and Hosea had laboured so long almost in vain? Or did the Apostles decline speaking to the Jews, because their Divine Master had succeeded with so few? Let us do our duty, and leave to God to bless our endeavours as he shall see fit. If we should run in vain, as it respects the Jews, our labours shall at least "be recompensed into our own bosom," nor shall so much as a cup of cold water given them for the Lord's sake be forgotten. As for the idea that the time is not yet come; who is authorized to declare that? To whom has the Lord revealed that? A similar objection was made by those who had no mind to incur the expense and trouble of building the second temple: they could build ceiled houses for themselves, but lay out nothing for the Lord^x: and this is the true secret of all such objections at this day: they are only so many excuses to veil our own want of faith and love. Let us arise and build without delay; and God will be with us. We have never yet tried to take the veil from their hearts: or the exertions that have been made, have been made too much in our own strength. Now there is a way adopted, which, we hope and trust, God will make effectual for the conversion of many; I mean, the giving to them their own Scriptures, together with the New Testament also in their own language, and both of them in other languages which they better understand. This, in concurrence with the other means that are using, will, we hope, be the means of removing the veil from the hearts of many, and of hastening forward the happy day, when the "children of Israel shall return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king^y;" and so "all Israel shall be saved^z."

And here let me observe, that to impart to them the light which we ourselves have received, is a duty of the first importance, because it has been committed to us for the express purpose of communicating it to them; God having especially ordained, that "through our mercy (or the mercy vouchsafed

^u Rom. xi. 23, 24.

^y Hos. iii. 5.

^x Hagg. i. 2—4.

^z Rom. xi. 26.

to us) *they* (the unbelieving Jews) should obtain mercy^a." Now, what should we say of any person to whom the care of a lighthouse had been committed, if, through his neglect to exhibit the light, the very fleet which he was appointed to preserve should suffer shipwreck, and ten thousand mariners be drowned? would not the whole nation charge him with the guilt of their destruction, yes, and visit him too with condign punishment for his offence? Yet *he* would be innocent in comparison of us, who have been accessary not to the loss of the bodily life of a few thousands; but to the eternal perdition of millions, in that we have neglected to set before them that light by which alone they could be saved. O let us not blame the Jews for the veil that is upon their hearts, but cast the blame where it is more justly due—on the Christian world, who have used no efforts to rend it from them, and to give them the light of life. And, as our neglect has been of long continuance, let us now exert ourselves with an energy that shall at once evince the depth of our repentance for our neglect of them, and the sincerity of our gratitude for the mercies vouchsafed to us.]

^a Rom. xi. 31.

MMXI.

CHRIST THE SOUL OF THE ENTIRE SCRIPTURES.

2 Cor. iii. 17. *Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

THE Scriptures are not sufficiently viewed as a *whole*. We are apt to take detached parts only, and to form opinions from them, when we ought rather to regard every part in its connexion with the rest; and so to get a comprehensive view of religion, in all its parts, and in all its bearings. The truth is, that revelation is the same from the beginning, and constitutes one great whole; it is a body having many parts that are visible and tangible: but it is penetrated by a soul, which, though invisible, really pervades every part; and that soul is CHRIST.

The Apostle, in the preceding context, is comparing the Law and the Gospel; which, if disjoined, may be considered, the one as a "*mere letter*," a ministration of death; the other, as a Spirit, a "*ministration of righteousness and life*^a:" but if they be viewed in their

^a ver. 6—9.

relation to each other, then is the one the shadow, whereof the other is the substance; the body, whereof the other is the soul.

This seems to be the import of the passage which I have just read. The Apostle is speaking of glorious truths veiled under the law^b; which, though in itself carnal, was full of "life and spirit^c." Now, says he, "the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" that is, where the true spiritual import of the Scriptures is understood, and Christ is clearly seen in them, and received into the heart through them, "there is that very liberty" which they were designed to impart.

The words thus explained will give me occasion to take a view of the whole revelation of God:

I. In its substance, as an exhibition of Christ—

The Old Testament, comprehending the law and the prophets, is one great body: but Christ is the soul that animates it throughout. He is the substance of,

1. The law—

[The moral law may seem to consist only of prohibitions and injunctions; enforced with promises to obedience, and threatenings to disobedience. But it is, in fact, a revelation of Christ, inasmuch as it "shuts us up to Christ, and is a schoolmaster to bring us to him^d:" for, in reality, every command, whilst it shews us how defective our obedience is, directs us to Christ; who has fulfilled it in its utmost extent, and has thereby wrought out a perfect righteousness for his believing people. This is the account given of it by an inspired Apostle, who says, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth^e."

The ceremonial law was nothing but a mass of "carnal ordinances," which had no force or value in themselves; but, as representations of Christ and his perfect work, were of infinite value. In them "the Gospel was preached, precisely the same Gospel as is now preached unto us^f." Christ was contained in every part of them^g; and was, in fact, the substance of which they were the shadow^h. This may be seen in all its sacrifices, &c. &c. — — —]

^b ver. 13, 14.

^c John vi. 63.

^d Gal. iii. 22—24.

^e Rom. x. 4.

^f Heb. iv. 2.

^g 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

^h Heb. x. 1. Col. ii. 17.

2. The prophets—

[These confessedly, with one voice, spoke of Christ: so that, from the first promise of “the seed of the woman to bruise the serpent’s head,” to the last that was uttered respecting “the Sun of Righteousness that should arise with healing in his wings,” all spake of him; all directed to him; and he was the life and soul of all — — —]

To those who thus enter into the full scope of revelation, it will be made known,

II. In its effects, as a ministration of liberty—

The whole of it, altogether, is “that truth which will make us freeⁱ.”

It will impart liberty,

1. From all legal obligation—

[As for the ordinances of the ceremonial law, they were all intended to be “abolished^k,” and are abolished^l. But even the moral law itself, *so far as it was a covenant of life and death*, is abolished. We are brought under “a better covenant,” a covenant of grace^m. We therefore hear the curses of the law without any emotion, except of love and gratitude. The thunders of Mount Sinai have no terror for us: “there is no condemnation to us,” because we believe in Christⁿ, and have in him a righteousness fully commensurate with its strictest demands^o. He has borne its curse for us; and left for us nothing but unalloyed and everlasting blessings^p — — —]

2. From all legal exertions—

[We no longer abstain from any thing through the fear of hell, nor engage in any thing to purchase heaven. As far as we are animated by the spirit of the Gospel, we can adopt those words of David, “I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way^q”: that is, I view thy ways as so excellent, that I would walk in them though there were no reward annexed to such a line of conduct: and I view sin as so odious, that I would not live in it, though I might do so with impunity. Indeed, were the Christian penetrated with any other spirit than this, he would render all his obedience worthless in the sight of God; who, though he tells us to *buy* the blessings of salvation, tells us that we must buy them “*without money, and without price*.”

ⁱ John viii. 32.

^k ver. 11.

^l Col. ii. 14, 20—22.

Heb. vii. 18.

^m Heb. viii. 6—13.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 1.

^o Rom. iii. 22.

^p Gal. iii. 13.

^q Ps. cxix. 128.

^r Isai. lv. 1.

Any attempt to obtain his favour by our own works will make void his whole Gospel, and infallibly disappoint our hopes^s: for nothing but perdition awaits such ignorant and ill-advised zeal^t.]

3. From all legal views and dispositions—

[Those who have truly received Christ into their hearts are “not his *servants*, but his *friends*”^u; yea, they are “sons of God^x,” and, with “a spirit of adoption, are enabled to call him, Abba, Father^y.” They go in and out before him with the liberty of endeared children: for “the Lord Jesus has made them free; and they are free *indeed*”^z. Formerly they were, as all men by nature are, in a servile spirit, doing every thing rather by constraint than choice: but now, “having no more the spirit of bondage to fear, they have received the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind^a,” and, under the influence of this spirit, they “walk at liberty^b,” and account the service of their God to be perfect freedom.]

4. From the power of sin altogether—

[This is the most blessed part of their inheritance. A freedom from “the bondage of corruption is the most glorious part of the liberty of the children of God^c.” And that this is possessed by them, the whole Scriptures bear witness. Let the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans be read throughout, and this matter will appear in the clearest light. A believer is dead with Christ; and therefore *cannot possibly* live in sin^d. The being under the covenant of grace ensures to him a victory over sin of every kind^e. From the moment that he embraced this better covenant, he was made free from sin (from its dominion); and being “become a servant of God, he has his fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life^f.” The whole of this matter is placed, if possible, in a stronger point of view in the eighth chapter of the same epistle; where the Apostle gives precisely the same view of the whole of revelation as we have done, and ascribes to it precisely the same efficacy: “*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus* hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, (hath done; that is, he hath) condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit^g.” Thus does

^s Gal. v. 2, 4.

^t Rom. ix. 31, 32. and x. 2, 3.

^u John xv. 15.

^x John i. 12.

^y Rom. viii. 15.

^z John viii. 36.

^a 2 Tim. i. 7.

^b Ps. cxix. 45.

^c Rom. viii. 21.

^d Rom. vi. 1, 2.

^e Rom. vi. 14.

^f Rom. vi. 22.

^g Rom. viii. 2—4.

the whole revelation of God, whether Law or Gospel, when rightly viewed, appear to be, as it is beautifully designated by St. James, “a perfect law of liberty^h,” and thus it is found to be, by all who embrace it “in spirit and in truth.”]

In conclusion, let me urge you,

1. To enter with all diligence into the true spirit of the Scriptures—

[They are in themselves “a sealed book:” nor can any but the adorable Lamb of God open them to our view. But beg of him to take away the veil from them; and from your hearts also, when you read themⁱ. Then will there be found a glory in them, even all the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. Be not contented with any thing short of this: for this alone will produce those glorious effects which are here ascribed to it^k.]

2. To make a right use of the liberty which they impart to you—

[There are some who profess godliness, and yet would “promise you liberty, whilst they themselves are servants of corruption^l.” But it is not a liberty *in* sin that Jesus gives; but a liberty *from* sin^m. St. Paul carefully guards us on this head; saying, “Ye, brethren, have been called unto liberty: only use not liberty for an occasion to the fleshⁿ.” Your liberty is, to “run the way of God’s commandments with an enlarged heart^o.” “Stand fast, therefore, in *that* liberty where-with Christ hath made you free; and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage^p.” Use, I say, your liberty aright for a little while; and soon you shall be as free and happy as the very angels of God around his throne.]

^h Jam. i. 25.

ⁱ ver. 14.

^k ver. 18.

^l 2 Pet. ii. 19.

^m Matt. i. 21.

ⁿ Gal. v. 13.

^o Ps. cxix. 22.

^p Gal. v. 1.

MMXII.

THE EXCELLENCY AND EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Cor. iii. 18. *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

THE Jews, when compared with the heathen world, were highly privileged; but the dispensation

under which they lived was in every respect inferior to that of the Gospel. Of this we are fully informed in the chapter before us. The Apostle, in vindicating his own character, incidentally mentions the blessings which the Corinthians had experienced by means of his ministry: hence he takes occasion to set forth the superior excellency of the Gospel above the law. In confirmation of this point, we will shew,

I. The excellency of the Gospel—

In the context the law is spoken of as a ministration of condemnation; whereas the Gospel is a ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness. Of the Gospel it may be said,

1. It is a revelation of the “glory of the Lord”—

[The law was in some degree a manifestation of the Divine glory; it displayed, however, chiefly the majesty and holiness of the Deity: but the Gospel displays the love and mercy of God; it exhibits all the perfections of God harmonizing and glorified in the work of redemption. Thus it is a revelation of “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ^a.”]

2. It manifests this glory to the soul—

[Moses veiled the Divine lustre which shined in his face. This was an intimation to the Jews that they could not comprehend the full scope of the law which he published^b: but this veil is taken away by Christ^c. The Gospel reflects Christ’s glory *as a mirror reflects the sun* — — — We behold that glory “with open, i. e. *unveiled* face.” This is the common privilege of “all” who believe.]

Nor is it more excellent in its discoveries than in its effects:

II. The efficacy of it—

The Apostle ascribes a wonderful efficacy to the Gospel. Experience attests the truth of his declarations. It transforms the soul into the Divine image—

[A view of Jehovah’s glory caused *the face* of Moses to shine; but a view of Christ’s glory in the Gospel changes *our hearts*. It renews us after the very image of our Lord and Saviour. It does this in every person who truly beholds it.]

^a 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^b ver. 13.

^c ver. 14.

Every fresh discovery which it makes to us of Christ's glory increases that effect—

[The first exercise of faith in Christ makes a great change, but subsequent views of his glory advance the work of sanctification. In this way is our progress in holiness carried on to perfection.]

This power, however, it derives wholly from “the Spirit of the Lord”—

[The Gospel has not that power in itself. Were its power inherent, it would operate uniformly on all: but its operation is dependent on the will of God^d. The word is called “the sword of the Spirit.” It is the Spirit's instrument whereby he subdues souls to the obedience of faith. Every fresh effect produced by it arises from the concurring operation of the Spirit: yet as it is the great instrument whereby the Spirit works, the effects are properly ascribed to it.]

INFER—

1. How great a blessing it is to have the Gospel preached to us—

[Nothing else will produce the effects here ascribed to the Gospel. The terrors of the law may alarm, but will not sanctify the heart; but the mild accents of the Gospel win the soul. A manifestation of Christ's glory constrains us to obedience. Let all rejoice therefore in hearing the glad tidings. Let all endeavour to experience these glorious effects.]

2. Whence it is that many make so small a proficiency in holiness—

[Many truly desire to advance in holiness, but they seek it in dependence on their own strength. Hence they make but a small progress in the divine life. They should rather use the means prescribed in the text. They should be often occupied in surveying the glory of Christ. The discoveries of his glory would do more than all their legal exertions — — — Let every eye therefore be fixed on him, till the effects appear both in our hearts and lives. Our views of him ere long shall be incomparably brighter^e; then the effects also shall be proportionably increased^f.]

^d 1 Cor. xii. 11.

^e 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

^f 1 John iii. 2.

MMXIII.

THE CONTEST BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN.

2 Cor. iv. 4—6. *The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

THE office of the ministry, if conscientiously discharged, is the most honourable and useful that a human being can execute: but, if perverted to carnal ends and purposes, it debases a man's character, and renders him more injurious to society than a raging pestilence. A minister, if he be upright before God, will not seek his own honour or interest, but the salvation of his people: he will be the servant of men for Christ's sake: he will employ all his time and talents in the line of his own peculiar profession; and will gladly sacrifice, not his reputation only or his interests, but his very life, if need be, in the service of his fellow-creatures: feeling the importance of his work, he will never degrade the pulpit by making it a theatre whereon to display his own abilities; but will commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and exert himself to the utmost to rescue sinners from the jaws of the devouring lion. St. Paul, in the passage before us, labours to impress this thought on our minds. Speaking of the blindness of men, not only under the law, but even under the clearer light of the Gospel, and having ascribed it to the agency of Satan, he affirms, that his one employment as a minister was, to co-operate with God in defeating the purposes of that wicked fiend.—Not content with having declared this sentiment in the verses preceding the text, he interrupts, as it were, the thread of his discourse, to repeat it; intimating thereby, that as he could not repeat it too often, so they who should follow him in the ministerial office

could never dwell upon it too much; "We preach not ourselves," says he, "but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

It is however to the other parts of the text that we wish to draw your attention at this time: they exhibit in a contrasted view,

I. The great powers that interest themselves about the souls of men—

Satan is more earnestly occupied respecting us than we are aware of—

[The power here called "the god of this world" is most assuredly the devil. His character is put in direct opposition to that of Jehovah; and therefore, however august the title may appear, it must be understood in reference to him, who has shewn himself from the beginning the great enemy both of God and man. He is called the god of this world, because the whole world lies under his dominion. Not that he is the rightful governor; he is a vile usurper, that has reduced our fallen race under his power, and exercises over them the most despotic sway. Repeatedly is he called by Christ himself, "the prince of this world;" and by the Apostle, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." It is by blinding their minds that he retains his power, and makes them account *that* liberty, which is, in fact, the sorest bondage. Is it asked, *How* does he blind their minds? We answer, He has a multitude of devices, which cannot be discovered without much deep experience, and much divine instruction. He puffs us up with a conceit that we know enough already; and thereby keeps us from seeking information. He stimulates us to the gratification of our corrupt propensities, that we may have neither leisure nor inclination to attend to our spiritual concerns. He fills us with prejudice against the doctrines of the Gospel as erroneous, and against the ministers and people of God as hypocrites or enthusiasts; and thus confirms us in our natural enmity against God himself. Sometimes he represents God as too merciful to punish; and, at other times, as too inexorable to forgive; and thus either lulls us asleep in security, or enervates us by despondency. By these and other wiles too numerous to recount, he keeps men in his snares, and "leads them captive at his will."]

Jehovah also condescends to interest himself in our behalf—

[The God of heaven is here opposed to the God of this world; and is described by an expression of his omnipotence

no less wonderful than the creation of the universe out of nothing; “he commanded the light to shine out of darkness.” While Satan is endeavouring to blind men, Jehovah exerts himself to enlighten their minds. He could indeed effect his purpose in an instant; but he is pleased to make use of means, and to form his new creation in a gradual manner. He sends his ministers to declare his truth, and his Spirit to seal it on our hearts. Thus, by fixing our attention to it, by making us to see its correspondence with our experience and our wants, and, finally, by giving us to taste its sweetness and excellency, he shines into our hearts, and dissipates the darkness wherein we were enveloped.]

The contrasted representation of these great powers exhibits to us also,

II. The ends and purposes they are endeavouring to accomplish—

Satan strives as much as possible to hide Christ from our eyes—

[Satan is aware that no one, who has a discovery of Christ's glory, will ever continue submissive to his government. Let a soul be favoured with a ray from heaven, whereby it shall have a glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Jesus, and it will instantly cast off its allegiance to Satan, and take up arms against him. But, while the veil continues on the heart, and this heavenly light is concealed from the view, the soul will be satisfied with its state, nor ever exert itself in earnest to break the yoke imposed upon it. This therefore it is the great work of Satan to accomplish: he cares not what we know or what we do, if he can but keep us from beholding the Divine image in the face of Jesus. As every thing short of this will be ineffectual for our salvation, so he is willing that we should have every attainment in knowledge or morality, if he can but succeed in this one point. This is the very marrow of the Gospel, if we may so speak; it is that which infuses life into the dry bones: in vain will each kindred bone resume its proper station in the body; in vain will the flesh and sinews be superinduced upon them; the body will be no other than a breathless corpse, till a spirit of life be infused into it^a: so will the soul, however exactly fashioned as to the outward appearance, be altogether destitute of spiritual life, till Christ be revealed to it, and formed within it. While “the Gospel is hid from the soul, it is, and must be, lost.”]

God, on the other hand, strives to reveal Christ unto us—

^a Ezek. xxxvii. 7—9.

[He knows that nothing short of a discovery of Christ will ever save the soul. If we speak with the tongues of men and of angels, if we have faith that can remove mountains, if we give all our goods to feed the poor, and our body to be burned, and have not that view of Christ which fills our souls with love to God and man, it profiteth us nothing^b. Not even a knowledge of Christ himself will be of any effectual service, if we do not see the Divine perfections united in him and glorified in the redemption which he has wrought out for us. Hence, in every dispensation, whether of providence or of grace, he aims at leading sinners to the perfect knowledge of his Son: nor can he ever look upon them with pleasure and complacency till this be accomplished.]

This subject will clearly SHEW us,

1. The value of our souls—

[Shall two such great powers interest themselves so much about us, and we imagine that our souls are of little worth? Surely that which incessantly occupies *their* attention must well deserve our incessant care — — —]

2. Our state before God—

[Let us not ask ourselves merely whether we be moral or immoral, but whether the scales have ever fallen from our eyes, and the glory of Christ been ever revealed to our souls? We must be made sensible that Satan once blinded us; that through his influence we were in unbelief; that nothing but a light from heaven could dispel this darkness; and that such a revelation of Christ to the soul is the only possible source of life and salvation. Let us inquire whether we have ever felt that conviction, and whether, under the influence of it, we have sought and obtained that divine illumination? This is the criterion by which we must judge ourselves, and by which our state will be determined to all eternity.]

3. The constant duty of our lives—

[Though we are not to neglect our earthly calling, we must seek above all to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ:” even after we have been enlightened, we need be careful lest Satan blind us again and again^c. We should seek continually the illumination of God’s Spirit, and, by increasing views of Christ’s glory, to be changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord^d.]

^b 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^c The falls of David, Solomon, and others, should put us on our guard.

^d If this were the subject of a *Visitation* or *Ordination* Sermon, it would be proper to shew in this place the duty of ministers to “preach Christ,” and to “know nothing but Christ,” in all their ministrations; since nothing but that will save the souls of those to whom they minister.

MMXIV.

MINISTERS, THE BEARERS OF A RICH TREASURE.

2 Cor. iv. 7. *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

ST. PAUL was occasionally constrained to vindicate his own character against the accusations of his enemies. He was averse to it; and, when so doing, accounted himself “speaking as a fool.” But, whensoever he boasted, his endeavour was to magnify, not *himself* but his *office*. As for *himself*, no terms were too humiliating for him to use, whether he spake of his former life, or of his present exertions in the cause of his divine Master. The passage before us well illustrates his views in both respects. The Gospel which he ministered was, in his estimation, “a treasure:” but he himself, and all his colleagues, were no better than “earthen vessels;” worthless in themselves, and only useful as imparting unto men “the riches which they contained.”

The passage before us will lead me to notice,

I. The true character of the Gospel—

It is here called “a treasure:” and well it deserves the name.

In itself, it is utterly invaluable—

[If considered as the product of Divine wisdom, it infinitely surpasses all that could have been conceived by the brightest intelligences in heaven: and, as an effort of Divine love, it is so stupendous as to be absolutely incomprehensible. In it, all the glory of the Godhead shines, with a splendour never before seen even by the angels around the throne. There is not a perfection of the Deity which is not honoured by it, and magnified far beyond what it could ever have been by any other device, or any other dispensation.]

As dispensed, it marvellously enriches all who receive it—

[To every soul of man that embraces it, is imparted a forgiveness of all sin, a peace that passeth all understanding, a strength that shall triumph over every adversary, and, at the close of this present life, all the glory and felicity of heaven.

In comparison of this, the riches of ten thousand worlds were nothing. Possessed of this, a Lazarus were rich; and in the want of it, the greatest monarch in the universe were poor.]

Most unsuited to this, however, appears to be,

II. The character of those to whom it is committed—

We should naturally expect, that those who are appointed to dispense this treasure should be taken from the highest order of creation, and from the very first rank amongst them. We should imagine that none but angels and archangels should be counted worthy of so high an honour. But God has judged otherwise; and has committed this treasure to “earthen vessels.”

The Apostles are justly so denominated—

[They were men of low origin, a few poor fishermen. They were exceeding frail in their nature, not one amongst them without some great blemish: for in the hour of their Lord’s extremity, “they all forsook him, and fled.” They were all worthless in themselves, “made of the earth, and earthly:” nor had they any thing in themselves, either to recommend the treasure, or to augment its efficiency. If Paul be thought an exception, on account of his learning and eloquence, he purposely laid aside his eloquence, from a persuasion that the wisdom of words had no other tendency than to make void the cross of Christ.]

And this is the character of God’s most faithful servants at this day—

[It is not from amongst the wise and learned that God, for the most part, selects his most active and efficient instruments. Not that he proscribes learning; but because he is jealous of his own honour, and would “have our faith to stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God^a.” He “chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty^b.” Not that any, however eminent, can claim any higher title than that assigned them in the text: for all are guilty, and need the same mercy which they preach to others; all are weak, and must be upheld by God every moment, lest they fall and perish. And not one amongst them can convert or edify one single soul by any power of his own. However useful any be, they are only like the pitchers which contained the lamps of Gideon^c — — — it was not the pitchers that in

^a 1 Cor. ii. 5.

^b 1 Cor. i. 26—29

^c Judg. vii. 19—21. God would not suffer Gideon to employ any thing like an effective army, lest they should ascribe the victory to

any respect contributed to his success; no, nor yet the light which they contained: it was the power of God accompanying that light, which obtained the victory; and which alone prevails at this day for the subduing of men to the obedience of faith — — —]

Let us now proceed to contemplate,

III. The peculiar advantage arising from this dispensation—

There is an “excellency of power” in the Gospel—

[There is nothing under heaven that accomplishes such wonders as this. It comes to men who are dead in trespasses and sins, and by a divine energy brings them forth to life. The prophet’s vision of the dry bones gives a just representation of its effects^d — — — We see how it wrought on the day of Pentecost, and afterwards throughout all the Roman Empire — — — And the same effects does it produce at this day, wherever it is preached in simplicity, and accompanied with power from on high. There are many living witnesses (not a few, I would hope, in this place) who can attest, that, by means of it, their “eyes have been opened, and their souls been turned from the power of Satan unto God.”]

By the weakness of those who dispense it, the power of God that accompanies it is the more displayed—

[If it were ministered by angels, men would be ready to ascribe its efficacy to the instruments by whom it was dispensed. But, when it was preached by poor fishermen, without learning, without any earthly power to support them, and in direct opposition to all the prejudices and passions of mankind, to what could its wonderful power be ascribed? To nothing, surely, but the mighty operation of the Spirit of God. So, if at this day God made use of none but the great and learned, we should give the honour unto those by whom he wrought, rather than to Him alone. But when he ordains strength, as it were, in the mouths of babes and sucklings, we are constrained to say, that He who works either in us, or by us, is God^e. By this it is clearly shewn, that “neither he that planteth is *any thing*, nor he that watereth; but God, that giveth the increase^f :” it is He that is “all in all^g.”]

themselves. It was by three hundred only, with their pitchers and lamps, that God wrought this great deliverance. And so it was by the ministry of a few poor fishermen, that he triumphed over all the powers both of earth and hell.

^d Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10.

^e 2 Cor. i. 21. and v. 5.

^f 1 Cor. iii. 7.

^g Col. iii. 11.

We may SEE, then, from hence,

1. How *we* are to *preach* the Gospel—

[The Gospel was never intended to give to men an opportunity of displaying their own talents, and of getting glory to themselves; no: we are “not to preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord^h.” It is a treasure committed to us, that, as God’s almoners, we should dispense it to an ungodly world. We are to think of nothing, but of enriching immortal souls. If we see not this effect, we should account nothing done to any good purpose, even though our names were celebrated over the face of the whole earth. And if we see this seal to our ministry, we should account ourselves truly blessed, though we were considered in no other light than as “the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things.” In preparing for our public addresses, we should keep this end in view: in delivering them, too, we should labour with all our might to attain it: and we should consider the enriching of one single soul with the unsearchable riches of Christ, a far more glorious recompence than all the dignities and wealth that could be heaped upon us.]

2. How *you* should *hear* the Gospel—

[You should lose sight of man altogether, and look only unto God. To “be of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas,” is a proof of sad carnality; and is the sure way to rob yourselves of God’s blessing. You should consider the public ordinances as God’s appointed means of dispensing wealth to your souls. You should go up to them poor, that you may be enriched; and empty, that you may be filled. As for the particular talents of the preacher, or the peculiarities which attend his ministrations, you should, as far as possible, overlook them; and fix your attention only on the treasure which he unfolds to your view, and presents for your acceptance. You would act thus in reference to a casket of jewels which was set before you: you would not despise them because the casket was plain; nor regard them because it was elegant. The enjoying of the possession is that which would be uppermost in your mind: and so it should be when the treasures of the Gospel are tendered to you. You should not consider the vessel in which they are brought: if it be of gold, your regards should not be fixed on that; nor, if it be “earthen,” should you undervalue the treasure it contains. To be enriched with all spiritual and eternal blessings should be the one object of your pursuit; and for that your mouth should be opened in prayer to God in secret; and your soul be expanded under the

^h ver. 5.

ministration of his word. Above all, be sure to look to God, and not to man; lest you provoke your God to jealousy, and he withhold from your souls his saving benefits.]

MMXV.

THE TRIALS OF CHRISTIANS THE MEANS OF MAGNIFYING
THEIR LORD.

2 Cor. iv. 11. *We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

THAT the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, was the Creator of all things, is readily acknowledged: nor will the assertion, that “without him was not any thing made that was made,” be for a moment disputed by any one who believes the Scriptures: but when the same expressions are used in reference to the events of daily occurrence, they gain not the same easy access to our minds: yet it is true in reference to all the works both of providence and grace, that “without him is not any thing done that is done:” all the evil that is done, is done by his permission: and all the good, by his agency. To direct the attention of men to him as the Sovereign Disposer of all events, is the continual aim of the sacred writers, who teach us to regard him as “upholding all things by his own power,” and overruling them for his own glory. One reason for his committing the ministration of his Gospel to a few poor fishermen was, that the enriching of the world with its treasures might not be ascribed to human wisdom, but altogether to the Divine power^a. For the same reason did he leave these “earthen vessels” to be treated in such a way as almost to preclude a hope of any long continuance of their ministrations: it was, to give the most decisive evidence to the world, that HE reigned on high, and by his almighty power preserved them, till they had finished the work which he had given them to do.

^a ver. 7.

St. Paul, maintaining the authority of his Apostleship against those who disputed it, shews, that, whilst the trials to which he was exposed appeared to render his divine mission questionable, the supports and consolations that were afforded him placed it beyond a doubt; yea, both the afflictions and consolations were sent *on purpose* that the almighty power and continual agency of the Lord Jesus Christ might be the more conspicuously seen, and more universally acknowledged. *Twice is this declared* in the short space of two verses^b; and it is a truth that demands from us the most attentive consideration. But that we may take the subject in the connexion in which it stands, we shall shew,

I. What was the state of the first Christians—

Perhaps the Apostle primarily refers to himself and his fellow Apostles—

Their trials were beyond all conception great. Whilst their Divine Master continued upon earth, they were screened from persecution^c: but when he was removed, they stood in the fore-front of the battle. At the very commencement of their work, they were all imprisoned, and beaten for their Lord's sake^d: and from that time they were treated with all imaginable contempt and cruelty. St. Paul, in this very epistle, enumerates such a catalogue of sufferings as would have broken the spirit of any man who was not miraculously strengthened by Divine grace: "He was in labours more abundant than any other Apostle, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews, he five times received nine-and-thirty stripes; (forty being the utmost that the Jewish magistrates were authorized to inflict on any criminal;) thrice was he beaten with rods; once was he stoned; thrice he suffered shipwreck; a night and a day he was (on some piece of a wreck) in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by his own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness^e." Now though he had a greater measure of these trials than others, they were to a very great extent the common lot of all: for it

^b ver. 10, 11.

^c John vii. 7.

^d Acts iv. 3. and v. 18, 40.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

is not of himself only, but of all, that he speaks in another place, saying, "I think that God hath set forth us the Apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place: we are made as the filth of the world, and the off-scouring of all things unto this day^f." Every one of them might with truth make the same solemn assertion as St. Paul did, "I protest by my rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus my Lord, I die daily^g."

But the whole Church were in fact exposed to the heaviest trials—

[Stephen, being distinguished by his gifts and graces, speedily fell a victim to the people's rage: and his death was a signal for a general persecution against the whole Church: and so bitter was this persecution, "that the people were scattered abroad through all the regions of Judæa and Samaria, none daring to continue at Jerusalem, except the Apostles^h." They had been taught from the beginning to expect this: they had been told, that, "if they would be Christ's disciples, they must take up their cross daily," and "forsake all," and follow him. The saints of former days had been called to suffer like thingsⁱ; and the same path was now prescribed to all the followers of Christ: "they must bear about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus^k," and "through much tribulation must enter into the kingdom of heaven." By "bearing about in their body the dying of the Lord Jesus," I understand the being subjected to the same trials as the Lord Jesus Christ himself endured when on earth: and this was, more or less, the appointed portion of all the early Christians: the same description of people who hated *him*, and persecuted *him*, hated and persecuted all who resembled him, and all who honoured him: "they had called the Master of the house Beelzebub;" and by the same ignominious name did they designate "those of his household." In a word, so vehement and universal was the hatred against the very name of Christ, that the mere profession of faith in him was esteemed a sufficient ground for imprisonment and death: so that the prediction of David respecting them was fully verified, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter^l."

How greatly we are interested in their history will appear, whilst we consider,

^f 1 Cor. iv. 9, 11, 13.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 31.

^h Acts viii. 1.

ⁱ Heb. xi. 35—38.

^k ver. 10.

^l Ps. xliv. 22.

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

The reflections which most powerfully suggest themselves to our minds, are,

1. How worthy the Lord Jesus Christ is to be loved and served—

[Every convert was taught beforehand what he was to expect: yet, in the face of all these dangers, millions embraced, and openly professed, the faith of Christ: and as fast as one set of Christians sealed the truth with their blood, others came forward to confess the same Lord, and “were baptized in the room of the dead^m,” like soldiers instantly springing forward to occupy the ranks which the devouring sword had thinned. So far were they from being intimidated, they were rather emboldened, by all that they saw and heard: if they fled from the sword of persecution, they availed themselves of the opportunity which their flight afforded them, to preach the Gospel throughout all the Roman empireⁿ, and “rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake.” The example of the Apostle Paul, though transcendently eminent in these respects, may serve to shew us what was the general feeling of the whole Church. Though his afflictions were so numerous and heavy, yet “none of these things moved him, neither counted he his life dear unto him, so that he might but finish his course with joy.” He was “willing not only to be bound, but also to die, at any time, and in any manner, for the Lord Jesus.”

Now in this way did the primitive saints shew their regard for Christ: when informed what sacrifices they should be called to make for him, they counted the cost; and considered the pearl cheaply purchased at the price of all that they possessed^o.

And is this pearl sunk in value? Does not the Lord Jesus Christ deserve as much at our hands as he did at theirs? Yes; it is in this way that we must all receive him: we must “account all things but loss and dung, that we may win him:” and “if we hate not father and mother, and even our own lives also in comparison of him, we cannot be his disciples.” Inquire, brethren, whether you have ever come to Christ in this way? whether you have ever had such exalted views of his excellency, as to determine you to know nothing, and value nothing, but him? and whether you have felt such a deep sense of your obligations to him as to “glory in the cross for his sake,” and to make even the most cruel death for his sake a subject of congratulation and joy, rather than of

^m 1 Cor. xv. 29.ⁿ Acts viii. 4.^o Matt. xiii. 46.

sorrow and condolence^p? When such are our views of Christ, and such the dispositions of our minds towards him, then, and then only, have we any scriptural evidence that we truly know him, and really belong to him.]

2. What rich provision we have in Christ—

[If we are Christ's, we must expect "fiery trials to try us;" for "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." But "if our afflictions abound for his sake, he will make our consolations to abound also." In this respect the Apostle's experience shall be realized in us: like him, we may be greatly tried; but, "though troubled on every side, we shall not be so *straitened*," as to have no way to escape: we may be so "perplexed," as not to know what to do; but "we shall not be left to despair," as though we had none at hand that was able to help or deliver. We may be "persecuted" by the whole human race; yet shall we "not be forsaken" by our God: we may be "cast down," and apparently vanquished, for a season; but we shall "not ultimately be destroyed." This is expressly promised to every member of the Church of Christ. "He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation make also a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it^q:" and in the full confidence of this we may exult as the Apostle did, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us^r." Our extremities may be such as almost to destroy all hope: but they shall be the seasons of his effectual interposition. "In the mount He shall be seen" by us, just as he was by Abraham^s: "when he sees that our power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left" to assist us, "then will he repent himself for us, and interpose for our relief^t:" and "when we are cast down, then shall we say, There is lifting up: for God will save the humble person^u."

Beloved brethren, *know what provision there is for you in this adorable Saviour* — — — and, whilst you reflect on "the help which is thus laid up for you on One that is mighty," learn to confide in him, and to say, "If God be for me, who can be against me?" "If my God and Saviour be on my side, I will not fear what either men or devils can do against me.]"

3. How thankful we should be that we are permitted to serve the Lord Christ on such easy terms!

[Though we must all have some cross to bear, yet our

^p Phil. ii. 17.

^q 1 Cor. x. 13.

^r Rom. viii. 35—37.

^s Gen. xxii. 14.

^t Deut. xxxii. 36.

^u Job xxii. 29

trials are nothing in comparison of those that were endured by the primitive Church. The worst that we are called to sustain is, a sneer, an opprobrious name, or some trivial loss. How light would the first Christians have accounted such petty sufferings as these! Yet even by these are many amongst us so intimidated, that they dare not to confess Christ openly. What then would such persons do, if the sword of persecution were drawn against them now, as in former days, or as at the time of the Reformation in our own land, when so many were burnt alive for the Gospel's sake? Well may we be thankful that such trials of our faith as these no longer exist: for, if such a sifting time were to arise, many, very many, amongst us, it is to be feared, would be found no better than chaff^x: many who now look gay, "receiving the word with joy, would on the rising of temptation and persecution presently fall away^y, and make shipwreck of their faith." *Let us all then be thankful for the rest we enjoy* — — — and improve it for our more abundant edification in faith and love^z; that, if God should see fit again to loose the chain by which our great adversary is bound, we may "be able to resist in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand."]

4. What under all circumstances should be our main concern—

[The end for which such grievous persecutions were permitted to harass the primitive Church was, that Christ's power and grace might be visibly seen in those who were called to endure them: and this very consideration made St. Paul to "take pleasure in all his distresses," because he knew, that the power of Christ would rest upon him, and "be perfected in his weakness^a." In like manner should we also rise superior to the concerns of time and sense, and be anxious only, "that Christ may be glorified in our body, whether by life or death^b." He is now seated at the right hand of God, and possesses "all power both in heaven and earth." In him is treasured up all fulness for the use of his Church, that out of it all his members may receive according to their several necessities. He is their life^c; and "they live by him, exactly as he, when on earth, lived by his Father^d," with whom he was altogether one^e. In all his miracles the finger of God appeared, because they were wrought by God: so in all the exercises of our spiritual life Christ is seen: because it is only by strength communicated from him, that we can either do, or suffer, as we ought^f. Let this then be our endeavour, namely,

^x Amos ix. 9.

^y Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

^z Acts ix. 31.

^a 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

^b Phil. i. 20.

^c Col. iii. 4.

^d John vi. 56, 57.

^e John x. 30.

^f Phil. iv. 13.

so to live, as to carry conviction to all who see us, that we are under the guidance and care of an all-wise, almighty Being. *Let our every act, as it were, shew, not only how Christ lived on earth, but that he now lives, and rules, in heaven; and that he is still as present with his people by his Spirit, as ever his own Father was present with him in the days of his flesh.* This is an object worthy the ambition of the first archangel: yet is it attainable by all of us, if only we will “live by faith on Christ,” and “cleave unto him with full purpose of heart.”]

MMXVI.

THE CHRISTIAN'S EXPERIENCE IN AFFLICTION.

2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. *Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

THE Christian in every state, whether of prosperity or adversity, differs widely from the unconverted world. While others are elated by the one and depressed by the other, he is kept in an equable frame of mind. As he does not place his happiness in earthly things, he is not much affected either with the acquisition or the loss of them. He is thankful for success, but not overjoyed, as though some great thing had happened unto him; and is patient in tribulation, knowing that in the issue it shall work for his good. To this effect the Apostle speaks in the text, in which he assigns the reason why, notwithstanding the greatness of his afflictions, he was kept from fainting under them. And his words afford us a proper occasion to consider,

I. The disposition which the Christian cultivates—

The account which St. Paul gives of himself is characteristic of every true Christian—

His chief aim is to attain things that are invisible—

[By “the things which are seen” we understand every thing which relates merely to the present world, which the Apostle comprehends under three names, “the lust of the

flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." By "the things which are not seen" must be meant the love and favour of God, the renovation of our inward man, the glory and felicity of heaven. The latter of these are the objects towards which the Christian turns his principal attention. Not that he neglects the concerns of this world; this would be absurd and criminal; but his great end and aim^a is to obtain an inheritance beyond the grave: even while he is most actively employed in secular concerns, he looks through them all to this grand object, and labours incessantly to secure it.]

To this he is led by the transitoriness of earthly things—

[The things of this world perish with the using. If they be not withdrawn from us, we must soon be taken away from them; nor will so much as one of them remain to be enjoyed in the future world. But spiritual things remain for ever. If we secure the love of God now, it shall abide with us to all eternity. An interest in the Redeemer's merits, and a title to all the glory of heaven, shall never be taken away from us. Death, so far from terminating our enjoyments, will bring us to the full possession of that glory, of which our present foretastes are an earnest and pledge. The Christian, seeing the infinite disparity between these things, determines to make invisible things the supreme objects of his regard, and comparatively disregards all that can be offered to the eye of sense.]

In this pursuit he is aided by his afflictions, as will appear, if we consider,

II. The privilege he enjoys—

The Christian has troubles as well as others—

[The very conduct he observes with respect to temporal things has a tendency to involve him in trouble. The world cannot endure to see their idols so disregarded, and their conduct so reproached. One would have supposed from the account given us of his sufferings, that Paul must have been the vilest miscreant that ever lived^b: but the more we resemble him in holiness, the more shall we resemble him in sufferings also. Our enemies indeed will not professedly persecute us for our holiness; they will assign some specious reason. Elijah shall be called "The troubler of Israel;" Paul, "The man who turns the world upside down;" and Christ shall be punished as a blasphemer and an enemy to civil government. But the

^a This seems to be the import of σκοπούμενον.

^b 2 Cor. xi. 23—27.

same reason obtains with respect to all,—the world cannot endure the light of their example^c.]

These troubles however shall work for his good—

[They “are not in themselves joyous, but grievous;” but they tend to refine his soul, and to fit him for glory; yea, inasmuch as these sufferings constitute a part of the obedience required of him, they bring with them a correspondent reward^d. In this view they are mentioned in the text as highly beneficial. They work for the faithful Christian a reward of glory; “a weight of glory” as great as his soul is able to sustain, and as durable as eternity itself. In comparison of this, the Apostle calls his troubles light and momentary, yea, not only light, but lightness itself; and intimates, that, if hyperbole were heaped upon hyperbole, it would be impossible for language to express, or for imagination to conceive, the greatness of that glory which his afflictions wrought for him^e.]

The preceding subjects being, to appearance, so remote from each other, it will be proper to mark,

III. The connexion between them—

Afflictions do not necessarily produce this effect—

[In too many instances the effect that flows from them is altogether opposite. Instead of purifying the soul, they fill it with impatience, fretfulness, and all manner of malignant passions; and instead of working out a weight of glory for it, they serve only to prepare for it a more aggravated condemnation. “The sorrow of the world,” saith the Apostle, “worketh death^f.”]

It is only where the pursuits are spiritual, that sufferings are so eminently beneficial—

[If the mind be set upon carnal things, it will be cast down when it is robbed of its enjoyments; it will say, like Micah, “I have lost my gods, and what have I more?” But the soul that affects heavenly things will be comforted with the thought that the objects of its desire are as near as ever. “While it looks at things invisible,” it will be quickened in its pursuit of them: it will be made to feel more sensibly the vanity and insignificance of earthly things, and be urged more determinately to seek “a kingdom which cannot be moved:” every fresh trial will make it long more and more for the promised rest; and the storms which menace its existence, will thus eventually waft it with more abundant rapidity towards its desired haven.]

^c John xv. 19.

^e This is implied in the original.

^d 2 Tim. ii. 12.

^f 2 Cor. vii. 10.

INFER—

1. How infatuated are the generality of mankind !

[It is but too evident that the generality of the world are seeking earthly things, while they who are pressing forward in pursuit of heavenly things are comparatively few in number. What a melancholy proof is this of men's blindness and folly! Who is there that, however much he may have gained of this world, has not found it all to be vanity and vexation of spirit? What comfort has any one derived from earthly possessions in an hour of deep affliction? And what benefit will accrue from them in the eternal world? Say, thou libertine, thou worldling, or thou false professor, what has the world done for thee? And what hast thou of all that is past, except shame and remorse in the remembrance of it? Who does not acknowledge the truth of these observations the very instant he begins to have a prospect of the eternal state? Yet, so infatuated are we, that though every successive age has seen the folly of such conduct, they have trodden the same delusive path, according to what is written, "This their way is their folly, and yet their posterity approve their saying." Let *us*, however, awake from our slumber; let us not so regard the things that are visible and temporal, as to forget that there are things invisible and eternal; let us live and act as for eternity; let us read, and hear, and pray, as for eternity. In this way we shall remove the sting from all present afflictions, and secure "an inheritance that fadeth not away."]

2. How blessed is the true Christian !

[As there is no state, however prosperous, in which an unconverted man is not an object of pity, so there is no state, however afflictive, wherein the Christian may not be considered as a happy man. However severe or long-continued his troubles may be, they appear to him but light and momentary; and however they may be productive of present pain, he has the consolation of knowing that they work for him a weight of glory, which will infinitely overbalance all that he can endure in the body. "Who then, or what, can harm him, while he continues thus a follower of that which is good?" Surely, even in this present world the Christian has incomparably the best portion. What he will enjoy hereafter, when he shall come to the full possession of his inheritance, it is needless to say. We can have no doubt but that the invisible realities will be found a very sufficient recompence for all his zeal and diligence in the pursuit of them. Let us then keep those realities in view, and the nearer we come to the goal, let us be the more earnest in "running the race that is set before us."]

MMXVII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S ASSURED PROSPECT OF GLORY.

2 Cor. v. 1—5. *We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.*

IT has justly been said of Christians, that if in this life only they had hope, they would be of all men in the most pitiable condition; seeing that they renounce all the pleasures of sin, and are exposed to all manner of trials for their Lord's sake. And certainly, if we consider the variety and greatness of St. Paul's sufferings, this may be applied to him with more propriety than to any other of the children of men. But, notwithstanding he was "delivered daily unto death for Jesus' sake, he was still cheerful and still happy: and, notwithstanding "his outward man decayed, his inward man was renewed day by day." Do we seek the cause of this? he had his eye fixed on eternal things, and derived from thence a fund of consolation sufficient to bear him up above all his afflictions. Death had no terrors for him; because "he knew that, when his earthly tabernacle should be dissolved, he had a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

But, as this experience was not confined to him, we shall take occasion from the words which we have read to shew,

I. The Christian's experience in the prospect of the eternal world—

He knows that there is a glorious mansion prepared for him—

[Here he dwells in a poor frail "tabernacle," like the

patriarchs of old^a, exposed to vicissitudes of every kind, and uncertain how soon he may be called to change his precarious abode. But he has a better tabernacle prepared for him, a house more glorious in its structure, and more lasting in its duration, even "a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Nor is his speedy enjoyment of this house a matter of conjecture with him, nor even of hope; it is a certainty, of which he is assured: he "knows" that such a tabernacle is prepared, prepared for him too; and that, "as soon as his earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved," he shall instantly be translated to it. It is the inheritance to which he has been born; and which is therefore "reserved for him," as he also is for it; the very power which made it for him being pledged to put him into the possession of it^b. To it the patriarchs looked forward as the certain termination of their earthly pilgrimage^c: and with still greater certainty does the Christian look forward to it, as being at this instant occupied by his forerunner, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who is gone before to prepare it for him, and is coming speedily to remove him to it^d." Like Job, he can say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and mine eyes shall behold him^e;" and with the same blessed assurance also he can add, "I shall be with him, and be like him," for ever and ever^f.]

In the prospect of this he longs for the period of his dissolution—

[In his present tabernacle he is laden with grievous corruptions, and beset with manifold temptations, and exposed to injuries on every side: and, from "his fightings without, and fears within," his time is often spent in sighs and groans. Many, many times does he exclaim with St. Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Notwithstanding "he has within himself the first-fruits of the Spirit, he groans within himself, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body^g." *Twice* is this mentioned in our text, to certify us the more fully, that groans are the common language of the heaven-born soul; and that it is in that language more especially that "the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us^h."

"To be delivered from the bondage of corruption," is certainly one great object which the Christian panteth after: but he also longs, and "earnestly desires," to be brought "into the glorious liberty of the children of Godⁱ." He knows

^a Heb. xi. 9.^b 1 Pet. i. 3—5.^c Heb. xi. 10.^d John xiv. 2, 3.^e Job xix. 25—27.^f 1 John iii. 2.^g Rom. viii. 23.^h Rom. viii. 26.ⁱ Rom. viii. 21.

that “when unclothed, as it respects his present tabernacle, he shall not be found naked” and destitute, seeing that a better habitation is ready for him; and it is his desire after this better habitation, that chiefly actuates him in his longings for the dissolution of his earthly tabernacle. It is “not merely to be unclothed,” and to get rid of his present troubles, but “to be clothed upon with his house from heaven,” and have “mortality swallowed up of life.” It is no disparagement to a godly soul to say, “O that I had wings like a dove^k! for then would I flee away and be at rest:” but it is a higher attainment to say, “I long to be dissolved, *that I may be with Christ*^l.”

We are ready to imagine that there is a confusion of metaphor in this place, and that “to be clothed upon with a house,” is an absurd expression: but, if we advert to the circumstance, that that house is “a tabernacle,” and that a tabernacle is constructed with an awning or covering cast over it, the propriety, and indeed the beauty, of the expression will appear at once. And when it is considered that even the tabernacle of the Most High was not so far superior to the accommodation of the meanest Israelite, as the mansions prepared for us are above the tabernacle in which we now live, we shall not wonder, that the soul of the believer sighs and groans for his blest abode; his abode, the residence of angels, the habitation of his God. It was this consideration that made Paul so satisfied in the near prospect of martyrdom: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand: but there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me^m.” It was the same, that rendered Peter also equally composed in the near approach of crucifixion. He designates even that cruel death by the gentle term of “putting off this tabernacle;” to which he was reconciled by the thought that an infinitely better mansion awaited him at his departure henceⁿ. But is it for Apostles only to enjoy this sweet assurance? Are they alone authorized to look forward with delight to the eternal world? No: this is the privilege of every saint. Heaven is the believer’s *home*: whilst he is here, he is a *sojourner*, in a state of *exile* from his Lord: and when he goes hence, he ceases from his pilgrimage, and goes *home* to the bosom of his God^o. If we are “walking by faith and not by sight,” that is, if we are true believers, that is our present portion, and “our eternal great reward.”]

But, whilst we assert that this is the Christian’s experience, it will be proper to shew,

^k Ps. lv. 6.

^l Phil. i. 21—23.

^m 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 13, 14.

^o ver. 6, 8. See the Greek.

II. How he attains to it—

It is wrought in him by his God—

[Man cannot work it in himself. Man may desire to get rid of his present trials, and in a fit of impatience may "choose strangling rather than life:" indeed it is but too common for those who are bowed down with a load of worldly troubles, to seek relief in suicide. But this is very different from the experience in our text, a principal ingredient in which is a desire after the glory and felicity of heaven. This no man can produce in his own soul. Man, of himself, has no conception of that blessedness, nor any taste for the enjoyment of it: much less has he such a view of it as will incline him to brave the most cruel death for the attainment of it. He who alone can work this in the soul of man, is God. He alone, who opened the eyes of Stephen to behold God, and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God, can give to any man a just apprehension of the heavenly glory, together with an assurance of his title to it, and his interest in it. He alone, who raised up the Lord Jesus from the dead, can so deliver us from the fear of death, that it shall appear to us a desirable acquisition. He alone, who has enabled us to say, "To me to live is Christ," can enable us to add, "To me also it is gain to die."

How God works this in the soul, it is not easy to state. We are but little acquainted with the workings of our own spirit, and still less with the operations of the Spirit of God. We know little of wind, but by its effects: as to the mode of its operation, we have but very indistinct notions about it: it is no wonder therefore that there should be many things relative to the operation of the Holy Spirit on our souls which we are not able clearly to define. But from the effects produced by him, we do assuredly collect his agency: and where we see an ardent desire after the heavenly glory, we do not hesitate to affirm, that the author of it is God; since none but He, who created the universe out of nothing, can create so blessed a disposition in the soul. This disposition is called "the earnest of the Spirit," which God gives to his believing people. Now an earnest is, not merely a pledge of any thing, but a part of the thing itself, given as a pledge that the remainder shall be imparted in due time: and hence that which is called in our text "the earnest of the Spirit," is in another place called "an earnest of our inheritance^p;" which being given to the soul by God, is to that soul a ground of the strongest assurance that the promised blessing shall in due time be communicated in all its fulness.]

^p Eph. i. 14.

It shall be wrought in all who heartily desire it—

[One of the most important lessons which the Gospel teaches us, is, that we should be ever “looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ^a.” We should not only be looking for it, but “hasting unto it,” even “to the coming of the day of Christ^r :” and the character given to all Christians is, that they do thus “love his appearing^s.” But, if we have not a well-grounded hope of glory, how can we delight ourselves in the prospect of that day? It is our taste of the grapes of Eshcol that assures to us the full enjoyment of the promised land : and it is our partial entrance on our rest in this world, that assures to us the complete possession of “the rest that remaineth for us^t.” Let us therefore seek the first-fruits, and we need entertain no fears respecting the full harvest.]

From hence we may LEARN,

1. How desirable it is to have the evidences of our conversion clear—

[Though the earnest of the Spirit is itself both a seal and evidence of our conversion, it must not be found alone ; much less must it be supposed to exist, where any habitual or allowed sin attests the contrary. The witness of the Spirit is in perfect harmony with the written word : and though it may for wise and gracious reasons be withheld from a person who is walking uprightly before God ; (for a man may “fear the Lord, and yet walk in darkness and have no light^u ;”) yet it never is vouchsafed to any one who is not serving God in sincerity and truth : and the man who imagines that he has the earnest of the Spirit, and the witness of the Spirit, whilst yet he is not unfeignedly and unreservedly devoted unto God, deceiveth his own soul. Some imagine that to speak of evidences is to encourage legality : but it is impossible to read the Epistles of St. John, and not to see, that he lays down, I had almost said, a system of evidences, whereby a man should try his state before God. Feelings, however strong, and whatever confidence they may generate in the soul, cannot be depended on, if separated from the dispositions and actions produced by them : and therefore I cannot but earnestly recommend every one to examine carefully the state of his own soul, lest he dream of heaven and awake in hell.”]

2. How light all trials should be to the believing soul—

^a Tit. ii. 11—13.

^r 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^s 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^t Heb. iv. 3, 9.

^u Isai. i. 10.

[Well does the Apostle in the words before our text call them "light and momentary;" so light, as to be "lightness" itself^x. Of what moment are the accommodations of an inn, where the traveller stops an hour in his journey to his father's house? Such travellers are we; and the period of our stay is at the utmost an hour, or rather, the twinkling of an eye. I may ask too, of what moment are his little inconveniences there, in comparison of the great and permanent felicity that awaits him? This is the true way to estimate our sufferings, of whatever kind they be^y. You who are most tried, fix your eyes upon the glory that shall be revealed: think of "the grace that shall be given you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Think especially too of your trials as loosening the pins of your present tabernacle, and hastening forward your entrance into that tabernacle that is prepared for you: view them, I say, in this light, and you will be so far from complaining of them, that you will rejoice and glory in them as the wise appointments of a gracious God: and "the trial of your faith will be precious, because it will be found to his praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ^z."]]

3. How blessed is the portion of every child of God—

[Inconvenient as his present abode is, and painful as his state at present is in some respects, he yet is truly blessed. Consider what prospects he enjoys, yea, what anticipations and foretastes of his future bliss; for by faith he has already as clear evidence of the future glory, as if he saw it with his bodily eyes; and as truly the substance of it, as if he had it already in his possession^a. Tell me not of his trials; for I say, he is a truly blessed man: and our blessed Lord again and again declares him blessed^b. Then think of his state as soon as this earthly tabernacle is dissolved; think of him as clothed upon with his house from heaven, and mortality, with all its attendant pains, "as swallowed up of life." Not an atom of his former troubles or weaknesses remains; all is *swallowed up*, and is as if it had never been. Read the account of him as dwelling in the tabernacle of his God^c, and you will break forth into the most heart-felt congratulations, "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord^d!"]]

^x 2 Cor. iv. 17. See the Greek.

^z 1 Pet. i. 7.

^b Matt. v. 11, 12.

^d Deut. xxxiii. 29.

^y Rom. viii. 18.

^a Heb. xi. 1.

^c Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

MMXVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN WALKING BY FAITH.

2 Cor. v. 7. *We walk by faith, not by sight.*

IF we behold any wonderful effects, we naturally inquire after the cause that has produced them. Now in the preceding context we behold as extraordinary a phenomenon as can be conceived: a sinner, like ourselves, not only divested of all fear of death, but longing after it as the consummation of all his hopes, and the completion of all his desires. This is a frame of mind totally unknown to man by nature, and incapable of being produced by any natural means. How then was it produced in the Apostle Paul? He tells us, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing, is God." But how did God work it? for it is certain that he works by means. I answer, By forming in his soul a principle of faith, and making that the great moving cause of all his actions. This is the account which St. Paul himself gives us in the words before us: "We are willing to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight^a." It was by faith that he attained this blessed state: and if, like him, we cultivate that heavenly principle, and take it as the spring and source of all our conduct, we shall find it productive of similar blessedness in our souls. It is, in truth, this principle, which above all others distinguishes the true Christian from every other person under heaven.

To explain and vindicate his conduct in reference to this matter, we will shew,

I. The principle by which the Christian is actuated—

He fixes his eye, not on things visible and temporal, but on things invisible and eternal—

[This is declared at the close of the preceding chapter^b; and the same contrast is marked in our text. Faith is opposed

^a Compare the text with the preceding and following verses.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 18.

to sight, and has respect entirely to things which are beyond the reach of mortal eyes. It looks upon an unseen God; even as Moses did, who feared not the wrath of Pharaoh, because "he saw him that is invisible^c." This great and adorable Being it beholds, and contemplates all his glorious perfections. It sees all his mind and will in the book of revelation: it recognises his superintending providence in all events: it regards him as inspecting continually the most hidden recesses of our souls, and noting every thing in the book of his remembrance in order to a future judgment.

Faith also views an unseen Saviour as the supreme object of his people's love, and the only foundation of all their hopes^d. It beholds him dying for their sins, and rising again for their justification: yea, it sees him interceding for them at the right hand of God, and preserving for them that peace which by their sins and infirmities they would soon forfeit. It enters into the whole of the Saviour's work and offices, surveying them in all their extent and variety; and particularly regards him as the fountain of life to all his people; as having in himself all fulness of spiritual blessings treasured up for them, and imparting to them continually out of that fulness according to their several necessities.

Faith views an unseen heaven also. It soars and penetrates into the very paradise of God, and surveys the crowns and kingdoms which God has there prepared for all that love him. There it beholds that glorious tabernacle which the soul shall inhabit as soon as this earthly house shall be dissolved: and in the promises recorded in the written word, it sees the possession of that glory assured to every believing soul, assured by an everlasting covenant, and by the oath of a "God that cannot lie."

Such are the objects of faith! and such the objects on which the Christian's eye is continually fixed!]

By these he regulates the whole of his life and conversation—

[These are the things which draw forth his regards; and in comparison of these all earthly things are but as dung and dross. For these he sighs, and groans, and weeps, and strives: to obtain an interest in them is more to him than ten thousand worlds. Whatever will endanger the loss of these, he flees from, as from the face of a serpent: and whatever has a tendency to secure his interest in them, he labours incessantly to perform. In these all his affections centre: his hopes and fears, his joys and sorrows, all terminate in these: and, in exact proportion as he is enabled by faith to realize and apprehend

^c Heb. xi. 27.

^d 1 Pet. i. 8.

these, he is happy. In a word, “ he *walks* by faith:” and every step he takes is under the influence of that principle. Faith is to the Christian what the compass is to the mariner in the trackless ocean: under all circumstances he consults its testimony, and follows its directions: and, in so doing, he fears not but that in due time he shall arrive at his destined haven.

This was the character of the Apostle Paul: and it is the character of every true Christian under heaven: “ the life which he now lives in the flesh, he lives by the faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave himself for him^e?”]

But as to those who understand not his views he appears to act absurdly, we will proceed to mark—

II. The reasonableness of his conduct in this respect—

Doubtless the people who are strangers to this principle must “ gaze strangely at” the Christian, and account him almost mad. The overlooking with comparative contempt all that he has ever seen, and following with all possible ardour things which no mortal eye ever did see, must appear the height of folly and enthusiasm; and we wonder not if many should say to him, “ Thou art beside thyself; much thoughtfulness hath made thee mad.” But we reply, that there is no comparison between the wisdom of walking by faith or of being actuated by sight.

The principle of faith is,

1. More exalted in its objects—

[The objects of sense are all poor, and mean, and worthless. Take all that eye ever saw, or ear heard, or heart conceived; and it would not weigh against one glimpse of the Saviour’s glory, or one taste of his love. Besides, it is all transient and of very short duration. But think of Almighty God and his covenant of grace; think of the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the wonders of redeeming love; think of heaven, and all its glory and blessedness; and then say, which are most deserving of our regard? In attaching ourselves to the one, we degrade ourselves to the state of unenlightened heathens, I had almost said, of the brute beasts; but by living wholly with a reference to the latter, we emulate, as it were, the glorified saints and angels. The one is as high above the other, as the heavens are above the earth.]

2. More certain in its testimony—

^e Gal. ii. 20.

[Earthly things may dazzle us with their glare and glitter: but they are all a lie, a cheat, a shadow, a delusion: there is no substance in them. With whatever confidence we press forward for the attainment of them, the more they disappoint our endeavours: and, when we think we have secured the prize, we no sooner stretch out our hands to lay hold on it, than it eludes our grasp: or, if we apprehend the object of our desires, it proves to us no better than vanity and vexation of spirit. But was ever any one deceived in apprehending the realities of the eternal world? Did ever any one who sought them by faith, fail in the pursuit of them, or find them, when attained, below his expectation? No truly: it is justly said by the Lord Jesus Christ under the character of wisdom, "I cause them that love me to inherit substance^f:" and every promise that makes over these things to the believing soul, is as immutable as God himself.]

3. More excellent in its operations—

[The tendency of visible things is to sensualize and debase the soul: but the effect of heavenly things is to purify and exalt it. The more we contemplate the Divine Being, the more shall we be transformed into his blessed image. The more we exercise faith on the Lord Jesus Christ, the more will grace, and mercy, and peace be multiplied unto us. The more we breathe the atmosphere of heaven, the more shall we be fitted for the everlasting enjoyment of it. "Every man that has such hopes in him, purifieth himself even as God is pure^g:" and the very promises by which he apprehends them, lead him to "cleanse himself from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^h." Truly "by these he becomes a partaker of the divine natureⁱ," and is progressively "changed into the divine image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God^k."]

4. More conducive to our true happiness—

[What does he possess who has the whole world at his command? A mere phantom: and, if he look for any solid happiness from it, he will find, that he has only "filled his belly with the east wind." But who can describe the happiness of him, who, by faith, has already in his soul "the substance of things hoped for, as well as the evidence of things not seen^l?" Who can declare the blessedness of him, who has God for his Father, Christ for his Saviour, the Holy Spirit for his Comforter, and heaven for his home? This man

^f Prov. viii. 17.

^g 1 John iii. 3.

^h 2 Cor. vii. 1.

ⁱ 2 Pet. i. 4.

^k 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^l Heb. xi. 1.

lives on "angels' food." He has grapes of Eshcol already by the way: he stands on Pisgah's top, surveying in all its length and breadth the land of promise: he has already an earnest and foretaste of the heavenly bliss: and, when he goes hence, he will change neither his company nor his employment: he is already dwelling in, and with, his God; and tuning his harp ready to join the choirs above, as soon as ever his attendant angels shall have received their commission to bear him hence.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are walking by sight—

[You are reputed wise by the men of this world; but are worse than fools in the estimation of your God. What has the world ever yet done for you? Has it ever yet afforded you any solid satisfaction? Possess what ye may, will not a pain, a loss, a disappointment, be sufficient to rob you of all your enjoyment? And what can it do for you in a dying hour? Will it prolong your life, or assuage your anguish, or pacify your conscience, or take away the sting of death? But, above all, what will it do for you at the bar of judgment? Will it bribe your Judge, or avert the wrath of an offended God, or mitigate your torments in the world of woe? You think the Christian unwise in having respect to things which his eye has never seen. But who will be found the wise man in that great and awful day? Not he that neglected God and his own soul; not he that trampled under foot his dying Saviour, and poured contempt on all the glory and blessedness of heaven; but he who lived as a pilgrim and a sojourner here, and "looked for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." O, that you "may be wise, and consider, ere it be too late, your latter end!"]

2. Those who profess to walk by faith—

[We thank our God that there are a goodly number of you who have learned to estimate things by their relation to eternity. O beg of God to "turn off your eyes from beholding vanity, and to quicken your souls in his way." Pray to him to "increase your faith," that your discernment of unseen things may be more clear, your enjoyment of them more rich, your improvement of them more uniform and abiding. Pray that your faith may be more and more influential on the whole of your life and conversation: and strive, in dependence on the Spirit of God, to walk more and more "worthy of your high calling." St. Paul, in his most assured prospects of glory, "laboured, that, whether present in the body, or absent from it, he might be accepted of the Lord^m." Do ye in this respect

follow his example: "not setting your affections on any thing here below," but "having your conversation altogether in heaven, from whence you look for the Lord Jesus Christ" "to come and take you to himself," that you may "be with him, and like him" for ever^a.]

ⁿ 1 John iii. 2.

MMXIX.

THE IMPROVEMENT TO BE MADE OF THE DOCTRINE OF A FUTURE JUDGMENT.

2 Cor. v. 10, 11. *We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*

TIME is generally thought to be of little use, except as it may be employed in amusements or in the prosecution of worldly business; but its value, as it stands connected with eternity, exceeds all calculation. The manner in which every hour is spent is recorded in heaven; every moment, as it were, increases our eternal happiness or misery. This consideration made the Apostle solicitous to redeem time himself, and to improve it for the good of others: "We knowing *therefore*," &c.

I. The Apostle's account of the day of judgment—

"Christ" is the person who shall judge the world—

[He who stood at Pilate's bar is exalted for this purpose^a. Our Lord himself plainly and repeatedly affirmed it^b.]

He will erect his "tribunal" in a solemn and public manner—

[Daniel spake of this in very exalted terms^c. Our Lord also has declared it^d.]

Before this "we must all appear"—

[All who have ever existed from the beginning to the end of the world shall stand at his bar^e. None shall be able to elude or to withstand the summons^f.]

^a Acts xvii. 31.

^b John v. 22, 27.

^c Dan. vii. 9, 10.

^d Matt. xxv. 31.

^e Rev. xx. 12, 13.

^f John v. 28.

All that we have done in the body will then be made manifest—

[The secrets of every heart shall be disclosed^g. The mask will be taken from the face of the hypocrite: the tears and sighings of the contrite will be declared before all^h.]

Then shall every one receive according to his doings, “whether they be good or bad”—

[The seeming inequalities of the Divine government will then be rectified: the godly will not then be any more condemned, or the wicked be justified. They who from faith and love have obeyed God shall be rewarded: they who have been disobedient and unbelieving shall be punishedⁱ.]

The rewards and punishments shall be respectively proportioned to the good or evil that has been done—

[They who have greatly improved their talents will be greatly rewarded^k: they whose sins have been peculiarly aggravated will be more severely punished^l.]

A more important consideration than this cannot enter into the mind of man.

II. The improvement which he made of it—

This subject is extremely awful even to the best of men—

[The most eminently pious are conscious of many defects. They know also the deceitfulness of their hearts. Hence not even St. Paul himself could fully rely on the verdict of his own conscience^m.]

But it is full of “terror” to the ungodly—

[To see him as their Judge, whose dying love they despised! To be confronted with all their accomplices in wickedness! To have the books of God’s remembrance opened! To have all their secret thoughts and desires exposed! To know that their doom is irrevocably fixed! To wait the dreadful sentence from the mouth of their Judge! To have nothing but an eternity of unmingled misery before them! What can be more terribleⁿ?]

Paul well “knew” this terror of the Lord. He therefore laboured “to persuade men”—

[He persuaded men to “flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life:” he *spared no pains* to attain this

^g Eccl. xii. 14.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 5.

ⁱ Rom. ii. 5—11.

^k Luke xix. 17, 24.

^l Luke xii. 47.

^m 1 Cor. iv. 4.

ⁿ Rev. vi. 14—17.

object of his wishes^o — — — he *regarded no sufferings* if he might but prevail on some^p — — —]

APPLICATION—

[*We would improve this subject as the Apostle did.* We know most assuredly these terrors of the Lord. We, on account of our office, are peculiarly interested in the events of that day^q: we therefore would persuade you to repent, and believe the Gospel^r: we would persuade you by every alarming or encouraging consideration. Consider the certainty of that day—the nearness of it—the greatness of the preparation necessary—and the consequence of dying unprepared. Consider the free remission, and the almighty assistance now offered you, and the blessedness of being prepared to meet your God. May we all lay these considerations to heart! May we at the last be found, not only almost, but altogether Christians!]

^o Rom. xv. 19. 1 Cor. ix. 19—22. ^p 2 Tim. ii. 10. Acts xx. 24.

^q Heb. xiii. 17. If this subject were addressed to *the Clergy*, this thought should be amplified.

^r Mark i. 15.

MMXX.

THE CONSTRAINING POWER OF CHRIST'S LOVE.

2 Cor. v. 14, 15. *The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*

ST. PAUL was more abundant both in labours and in sufferings than any other of the Apostles: but his zeal was by many considered as no better than madness. To the lukewarm, as well as to those who were altogether careless, he appeared to be transported far beyond the bounds of reason and propriety; and they therefore did not hesitate to say that “he was beside himself.” But whilst he was thus condemned as a wild enthusiast, he cultivated in reality the strictest sobriety; as is evident throughout his whole history, and in all his epistles. But, “it was with him a small matter to be judged of man’s judgment:” he cared not what opinion his adversaries formed of him, whilst he had the consciousness that he was actuated

by zeal for God, and by love to man. Nevertheless he was not backward to declare whence his zeal arose; nor was he afraid to let his enemies themselves judge whether it was rational or not. He tells them, that, "if he was beside himself, it was to God," that he might be glorified; or, "if he was sober, it was for their cause," that they might be benefited: but that, whatever judgment might be passed upon him, the love of Christ constrained him, and under the influence of that he thought it right to live entirely to his God.

In vindication of the Apostle, and for the regulating of our own minds, we shall inquire,

I. What it was which stimulated him to such unparalleled exertions—

It was "the love of Christ which constrained him." By this I understand, not his love to Christ, but Christ's love to him; which is here mentioned in its two great leading features;

1. His dying for us—

[Wonderful indeed was this love! that when he was incapable of any increase of honour or happiness himself, he left the bosom of his Father, and took our nature upon him with all its sinless infirmities, on purpose that he might expiate our guilt by his own blood, and work out a righteousness for our acceptance before God — — — That he should do this *so readily*, undertaking every thing as soon as it was proposed to him by the Father^a, and adhering to his engagement till it was perfectly fulfilled, not dissuaded by any^b, nor deterred by the dreadful prospect of all his sufferings^c, but drinking to the very dregs the bitter cup, and completing every thing till he could say "It is finished:" well may it be said, "What manner of love was this!"]

2. His employing for us the life that was restored to him at his resurrection—

[As "he died for our offences, so he rose again for our justification." He is as much occupied about the work of our salvation now, as he was when living on earth, or dying on the cross: "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." Every thing is put into his hands, in order that he may manage it

^a Ps. xl. 6—8.

^b Matt. xvi. 23.

^c Luke xii. 50.

for our good. All the works of Providence are directed and overruled by him for the furtherance of our welfare: and he, as the living Head of his people, imparts to them such measures of grace as he sees needful for them. In a word, he lives in them as in his temple, and carries on the whole work of grace in them, and never suffers so much as "one of them to perish" — — — Can we wonder that such love as this constrained the Apostle, and carried him forward, like a resistless torrent, in the service of his God? — — —]

The Apostle, in further vindication of himself, proceeds to state,

II. Why he suffered it to have such an ascendant over him—

He acted not from feeling *only*, though doubtless the flame of love that was thus kindled in his soul burned with inextinguishable ardour^d; but from judgment also: "he judged,"

1. That our obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ are infinite—

[It is plain, that "if one died for all, then were all dead." And was this *our* state? Were *we* dead in trespasses and sins, and under a sentence of eternal condemnation? O! what do we owe to that Saviour who emptied himself of all his glory for us, "who died for us when enemies," and actually became a curse for us, bearing in his own person all that was due to the iniquities of a guilty world! The apostate angels had no such mercy shewn to them: they fell, and had none to help them; and are therefore "reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." And had not the Lord Jesus Christ died for us, we had been dead still, and should have been to all eternity companions with the fallen angels in misery, as we have been in transgression. Moreover, his life is as necessary for us as his death: for if he did not keep us every moment, even as the apple of his eye, no one of us could endure unto the end: the great adversary of mankind, who tempted our first parents to sin, would beguile and ruin us for ever, if Jesus did not carry us in his bosom, and give us grace sufficient for our returning necessities.

Judge then whether this be not a reason for loving him, and for devoting ourselves unreservedly to his service? Can too much be done for him, who has done, and is doing, so much for us? Or should we think much of any sufferings that we may be called to endure for him? Should we not even rejoice

^d Cant. viii. 7, 8.

if we are counted worthy to suffer for him, and welcome even death itself, if only "his name may be magnified?" If to entertain such sentiments, and to pursue such conduct, be madness, I would to God that we all were as obnoxious to the charge as Paul himself! But let the world say or think as they will, such a devotedness to God is "a reasonable service^e."]]

2. That the very end for which the Lord Jesus Christ has conferred those obligations upon us, is, that he may bind us to himself in a state of holy obedience—

[It is not to rescue us from death and hell only, that Jesus has died for us, but to deliver us also from sin and Satan, and to bring us back to the state from which we are fallen. Were we created holy and happy, even like the angels themselves? to that state would the Lord Jesus elevate us again, that both in this world and to all eternity we may delight ourselves in God. This is declared to be the express purpose of his death^f." Did he then "die to redeem us from all iniquity," and shall we still live in sin of any kind? Did he die to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works; and shall we not labour to attain this blessed character? Shall there be any bounds to our zeal; or shall we restrain it because a blind and ungodly world agree to call it madness? What if Mary was censured by the proud Pharisee for her over-righteous zeal; did Christ condemn it? Did he not even compel the Pharisee unwittingly to condemn himself^g? We mean not by this to justify any departure from real sobriety of mind; for religion is a sober thing, being not like the transient glare of a meteor, but like the steady course of the sun: but this we would do; we would dissuade all from living in any measure to themselves, and bring them to live wholly and entirely to their God; and, if the world deride this as enthusiasm, and prescribe to us a lower standard of duty, we would say with Peter, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye;" for we cannot but consult his will, and approve ourselves to him^h.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us all seek an interest in Christ—

[Has he died for us; and shall we die too? God forbid. It is a blessed truth, that he has "died for *all*," and "given himself a ransom for all," and "tasted death for every man,"

^e Rom. xii. 1.

^g Luke vii. 37—47.

^f Tit. ii. 14.

^h Acts iv. 19, 20.

and made himself “a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.” How awful then the thought that any should “perish, for whom Christ died!” What a bitter reflection will it be to such persons in the eternal world, that Christ died for them, and yet they would not seek for salvation from him! O that this may not be our unhappy state! Let us look to him, and believe in him, and live by faith upon him now, that we may live with him for evermore.]

2. Let us meditate much upon his love—

[Were we but duly sensible of his love to us, we could not refrain from loving and serving him. O think what a subject for contemplation this is! It has been the one theme of praise and adoration in heaven for thousands of years, and will be to all eternity; and shall we not delight in the contemplation of it? It has “a height and depth, and length and breadth, that is utterly unsearchable.” Beloved brethren, meditate upon it, till the fire kindle in your hearts, and you be constrained to “glorify him with your bodies and your spirits which are his.”]

3. Let us endeavour to answer the true end of all his love—

[You have heard what this was, even “that you should not henceforth live unto yourselves, but unto him.” Now, then, set about the blessed work. Let the pleasures, the riches, the honours of the world be to you as the dirt under your feet: “be crucified to the world, and let the world be crucified unto you.” And begin to walk as Christ walked, and to follow the example which St. Paul has set you. Let the world despise you, if they please; seek ye the approbation of your God: and when they, like Michal, deride your piety, say ye with holy David, “If this is to be vile, I will be yet more vile than thus!”]

ⁱ 2 Sam. vi. 22.

MMXXI.

THE CHRISTIAN A NEW CREATURE.

2 Cor. v. 17. *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

A FAITHFUL discharge of our duty to God has in every age rather provoked the displeasure, than conciliated the favour, of a wicked world. The most

eminent characters, instead of escaping censure by means of their distinguished piety, have on the contrary incurred the greatest portion of obloquy and reproach. It was thus that St. Paul's love and zeal were requited by many at Corinth; he was deemed "beside himself." But indifferent both to their censure and applause, he declared to them the motives by which he was actuated; he told them plainly that he was under the constraining influence of the love of Christ, and that, however strange his views and actions might appear, they, if they were Christians indeed, would certainly adopt and imitate them; their present views and habits would pass away, and all become new. In the words of the text we have the character of a Christian,

I. Figuratively expressed—

A man is said to be "in Christ," when he is engrafted into him as a branch of the living vine, or, in other words, when he truly believes in Christ: he is then a Christian. But in order to shew what a change every man experiences when he becomes a Christian, the Apostle says of him that he is "a new creation^a." In this term there is a reference to the creation of the world, which may be considered as a type or pattern of that work which God performs in the hearts of his people. The correspondence between them may be seen in the *manner*, the *order*, and the *end* of their formation—

1. In the manner—

[The world was created by God, according to his own sovereign will, without the intervention of human aid: and, though brought into existence in a moment, was gradually perfected in its various parts^b. Thus the souls of God's people are regenerated purely by the sovereign will of God, and entirely through the agency of his word and Spirit^c; though they use the appointed means, it is God alone that renders those means effectual^d; "He who made the light to shine out of darkness, shines into their hearts to give them

^a Κτίσις. ^b Gen. i. 3—31. ^c Jam. i. 18. John i. 13. Tit. iii. 5.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 5, 6. and Eph. ii. 10.

the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ^e." There is an instant of time, however unknown to us, when the new man as well as the old, receives the vital principle; a moment, wherein we are "quickened from the dead," and "pass from death unto life:" but the work of grace is carried on in a constant progression, and "the inward man is renewed day by day^f."]

2. In the order—

[Light was the first thing that was produced in the material world: and, after that, the confused chaos was reduced to such a state as that there should be an harmony in all the parts, and a subserviency in each to the good of the whole. Thus light is first darted into the mind of the regenerate man^g; a view of his guilt and misery is given to him, and then his disorderly passions, which blinded his judgment and sensualized his soul, are rendered subject to reason and religion^h.]

3. In the end—

[The world was formed by God for his own glory: as all things were by him, so also were they *for* himⁱ. It is for this end also that he renews the souls of men after his own image. He rejoices indeed in the good of his creatures, and in a subordinate measure may propose that as the end of his dispensations: but we are assured his principal intent is, to shew forth the exceeding riches of his own grace, and to exalt himself in the eyes of his redeemed people^k.]

We are at no loss to understand the preceding figure, since we have, in the text, its import,

II. Plainly declared—

Justly is a work of grace represented as a new creation; for, as in the reduction of the confused chaos to order and beauty, so also in the restoration of the soul after God's image, "old things pass away and all things become new." The Christian experiences this change,

1. In his views of every important subject—

[He once judged *sin* to be a light and venial evil: if it were of a very gross nature indeed, or committed against himself in particular, he might feel some indignation against it: but if it were not reprobated by the world, or injurious to

^e 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 16.

^g Col. iii. 10.

^h Eph. i. 17, 18. Col. i. 9, 10.

ⁱ Col. i. 16. Rev. iv. 11.

^k Eph. ii. 7.

himself, he would behold it without sorrow and practise it without remorse. But very different are his views of it when once his eyes are opened to behold it in its true colours: it then appears to him as base, loathsome, abominable: he hates it from his inmost soul: he desires deliverance from it as much as from hell itself: he would not harbour it in his heart for one moment, but would extirpate it utterly, as well from his thoughts as from his actions. Nor are his sentiments less altered respecting *Christ*: he once felt no love towards him, notwithstanding he complimented him with the name of Saviour. But now the name of Jesus is precious to him: he is filled with admiring thoughts of his incomprehensible love: he adores him with devoutest affection; and “cleaves to him with full purpose of heart.” He once “saw no beauty nor comeliness in him;” but now views him as “fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely.” The same change takes place with respect to the *world*, and *holiness*, and every thing that has any relation to eternity: so that he really becomes altogether a new creature.]

2. In the great ends and aim of his life—

[The unregenerate man, to whatever class he may belong, whether he be sensual and profane, or moral and devout, invariably makes *self* the principle and end of all his actions: his life is one continued scene of self-seeking, self-pleasing, self-complacency. He makes his very duties to God subservient to his main end of gratifying his desire after self-approbation and the applause of man. But these old desires are mortified when once he becomes a real Christian: they will indeed often rise in his mind, because he is “renewed only in part;” but he has a far higher end, which he infinitely prefers, and to which he gives a deliberate, determined ascendancy. He has a concern for the honour of his God; and he strives that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus. Whether his actions be of a civil or religious nature, he still proposes to himself the same end, to glorify God with his body and his spirit which are God’s¹. To this the Apostle seems to have peculiar respect in the preceding context^m; nor is there any thing that more strongly characterizes the child of God.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let every one put this question to himself, *Am I a real Christian?*

¹ 1 Pet. iv. 11. 1 Cor. vi. 20. 1 Cor. x. 31.

^m See ver. 15. with which, rather than with ver. 16. the text is connected.

[The Apostle leaves no room for exceptions in favour of any man whatsoever; "if *any* man be a Christian, he is, and must be, a new creature." Nor does this import a mere change from profligacy to morality, or from a neglect of outward duties to the performance of them: the change must be *entire*; it must pervade every faculty of the soul; it must influence all our words and actions, our thoughts and desires, our motives and principles. *Has then this great change been accomplished in us?* On this point eternity depends. O that we might not give sleep to our eyes or slumber to our eyelids, till we can return a favourable answer upon sure and scriptural grounds!]

2. Let those who have experienced a work of grace, seek to have it carried on and perfected in their souls—

[It must ever be remembered, that the renovation of the soul is a gradual and progressive work: we are to be continually putting off the old man, and putting on the new". Let us then not rest in low attainments; but rather, "forgetting the things that are behind, let us press forward unto that which is before." Let us beg of God to "perfect that which concerneth us," and to form us altogether "into his own image in righteousness and true holiness." It is by our progress that we must manifest the work to have been begun; and then only can we be sure that our path is right, when, "like the light, it shineth more and more unto the perfect day."]

ⁿ Eph. iv. 22—24.

MMXXII.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

2 Cor. v. 19, 20. *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

NATURAL as well as revealed religion teaches us that God is the author and giver of all good things. He originally formed man out of the dust of the earth, and still brings us into existence in our successive generations. He appoints the time and place of our birth: he bestows the talents we severally possess:

he preserves the health of our bodies, and the vigour of our minds: "in him we altogether live, and move, and have our being." Nor is it less evident that redemption also is the work of his hands: for he formed the plan alone, and executed it without the creature's aid. He sent his Son; and qualified him for his office; and upheld him in it. He laid our iniquities on him; and accepted his vicarious sacrifice; and commissioned his Apostles to declare these tidings to the world. All this is plainly asserted in the passage before us; from which we shall,

I. Shew what God has done to save us—

There are two things particularly specified in the text:

1. He has wrought salvation for us—

[Man in innocence walked with God as a friend; but, as soon as he had fallen, shunned his presence, and fled from him as an enemy. Since that time "the carnal and unrenewed mind has been in a state of enmity against God;" and all the children of men have shewn themselves "enemies to God in their minds by wicked works." To effect a reconciliation for themselves was impossible: but God, in his infinite mercy, opened a way for their restoration to his favour. He assumed our nature, and, in the person of Jesus Christ, became our substitute and surety; that, by his own obedience to the law which we had broken, and his enduring of the penalties which we had incurred, he might make satisfaction to his injured justice, and pardon us without any dishonour to himself. By this means "he has reconciled the world unto himself;" "nor will he impute to any their trespasses," if they will accept the reconciliation which he offers them.]

2. He has sent salvation to us—

[God has in every age raised up men to whom "he has committed the word of reconciliation," on purpose that they might publish it to their fellow-creatures. He has not committed it to angels, whose presence would confound us, and who, from their never having tasted the bitterness of sin, would probably be unable to sympathize with us: but he has appointed those to speak to us, who are "encompassed with the same infirmities," and who need the same forgiveness, as ourselves. To these "he has given the ministry of reconciliation." He sends them forth, not to tell men how to purchase his favour, or how (as the common expression is) *to make their*

peace with God; but to inform them, that "Christ is our peace," and that "God, for Christ's sake, is ready to forgive us all our trespasses." This is the sum and substance of the Gospel. This is the "treasure which God hath put into us earthen vessels," for the enriching of the poor, and the saving of the lost. And, in having thus sent the tidings of salvation home to our own doors, he has done what will leave us without excuse for ever.]

That such grace may not be displayed in vain, let us,

II. Urge you to accept salvation—

The message we are commissioned to deliver to you, is, "Be reconciled to God"—

[*Acknowledge that you have indeed been enemies to God.* Surely none of us can doubt whether such have been our state. Let us only look back upon our violations of his law, and they will bear ample testimony to this melancholy truth.

Being convinced of your enmity against God, *be humbled for it in dust and ashes.* It is not possible to bewail too deeply the guilt which you have contracted.

Be careful to *seek reconciliation with God in the way which he has pointed out.* Beware of attempting to make satisfaction, as it were, for your sins; for you owe ten thousand talents, and cannot pay one single mite. God in Christ has taken your debt upon himself; and he is willing "frankly to forgive you all." Go to him then, and receive mercy at his hands "without money, and without price^a."

As ambassadors of Christ we would urge our suit with becoming earnestness—

[Though we are neither inspired, nor empowered to work miracles, like the Apostles of old, yet are we truly "ambassadors from Christ" to a guilty world; and we come in his name and stead to treat with you respecting peace. We proclaim an eternal amnesty, if you return to your allegiance: and though, as God's representatives, we might command, yet, after Christ's example, "we beseech you to be reconciled to God."

And is this an unreasonable request? Is it not, on the

^a Some have thought that because *we* are called upon to be reconciled to God, the enmity subsists only on *our* part. But not to mention a multitude of passages that represent God as "angry with the wicked," the very term *καλλάγητε* is used by our Lord himself as expressive of the offending party seeking pardon from the offended, Matt. v. 24.

contrary, most reasonable that you should be reconciled to him, who never rendered any thing to you but good, in return for all the evil you have done against him? Is it not madness to continue in rebellion against him, who must prevail at last? And is it not better to bow to the sceptre of his grace, than to be "broken in pieces with his rod of iron?"

What would you reply, if God should entreat you by a voice from heaven? would you still refuse? Know then, that "God himself beseeches you by us;" and if you continue to pour contempt on *this* mercy, your "punishment will be sore" indeed.]

APPLICATION—

[What account now shall we give to him who sent us? Must we return and say, "Lord, we have spoken to them; but they will not hear; we have invited; but they all begin with one consent to make excuse?" O think with yourselves, how soon "this day of acceptance and salvation" may be passed; and how aggravated will be your condemnation, if you reject these overtures of mercy! Let not our embassy be unsuccessful; but be prevailed upon to "seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near." Remember however that, if you be restored to God's favour, you must also be reconciled to his government: you must not assume a subject's name, and retain a rebel's heart: if you "name the name of Christ, you must depart from all iniquity."]

MMXXIII.

THE WAY OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD.

2 Cor. v. 21. *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

A MORE important question cannot be asked than this, "How shall man be just with God?" In the words before us, that question is resolved. The Apostle has before declared in more general terms, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:" but in our text he enters more particularly into the subject, and informs us, that, in order to effect a reconciliation between our offended God and us, God caused a double transfer to be made; first, of our sins to Christ, that they might be punished in him;

and next, of Christ's righteousness to us, that it might be rewarded in us, and that we might be accepted through it. This doctrine of the mutual transfer of our sins to Christ, and Christ's righteousness to us, being not generally understood, we will,

I. Explain it—

Two things are to be explained :

1. The imputation of our sins to Christ—

[It is an undoubted fact, that the Lord Jesus Christ died under the curse of God's broken law. But was he himself a sinner? No: in him was no sin: both in his Divine and human nature he was perfectly holy: and he was able to appeal to his bitterest enemies, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Indeed, if he had had sin himself, he could not have atoned for our sins. The lamb that was slain at the passover was to be without spot or blemish: and such was Christ, after the fullest possible examination, proclaimed to be by the very judge who condemned him. It was for our sins that he died: they were laid upon him by his own consent, that they might be punished in him, and that through his vicarious sacrifice we might be absolved. This will be best understood by the sacrifices which were offered under the law. The person who had sinned was exposed to the wrath of his offended God. But by God's appointment he brought an offering, a bullock or a kid, and, after putting his hands upon the head of his offering in token of his transferring his guilt to it, the victim was slain in his stead, and he was absolved from his guilt. The particular command, that the offender should put his hand on the head of his offering, places beyond all reasonable doubt the point we are insisting on^a — — —]

2. The imputation of Christ's righteousness to us—

[Man, though forgiven, was still incapable of fulfilling perfectly in future the law of God, and consequently was incapable of working out a righteousness wherein he could stand before God. A righteousness therefore was provided for him fully adequate to all the demands of God's holy law, even the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by his own obedience unto death, not only "made an end of sin, and reconciliation for iniquity, but brought in also an everlasting righteousness^b," which is "unto all, and upon all them that believe in him^c." It is on this account that he is called, "The Lord our righteousness." Thus, "He is made right-

^a Lev. iv. 4, 15, 24, 29. See also particularly Lev. xvi. 21, 22.

^b Dan. ix. 24.

^c Rom. iii. 21, 22.

eousness unto us," and we are made, as our text expresses it, "the righteousness of God in him." It is not to be expected that this should be capable of such illustration as the former point, because nothing similar to it ever did, or could, exist: yet we may behold something of the kind in the very sacrifices which were first offered. We are informed, that, after their fall, our first parents "sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons," because by their sin they had made themselves naked to their shame. But God, we are told, "made coats of skins, and clothed them^d." If it be asked, of what beasts were these skins? we answer, of those beasts which God had previously appointed to be offered in sacrifice to him: (for, if this was not the time when sacrifices were ordained, we have no account whatever of their first institution, notwithstanding they were undoubtedly of Divine origin:) and the very beasts which died as sacrifices for their sins, provided them also with clothing to cover their nakedness. Thus the Lord Jesus by his death atones for our sins, and by his righteousness clothes us as with an unspotted robe, in which we stand before our God without spot or blemish^e.]

But as this doctrine is disputed by many, we will proceed to,

II. Vindicate it—

Some deny this doctrine as unscriptural, whilst others abuse it to licentiousness: but against all we will vindicate it as the only true way of reconciliation with God: against,

1. The proud infidel—

[One will say, this doctrine of a mutual transfer is not agreeable to my reason. But reason is not competent to judge of these matters. This is a point of pure revelation: and the office of reason in relation to it is, not to sit in judgment upon it, but to inquire whether it be really revealed: and, if it be, then is it to be assented to as true, whether we can comprehend it or not. But it is not at all repugnant to reason. We see daily somewhat of a similar nature transacted before our eyes. A man has made himself surety for his friend; that friend becomes insolvent; and his debt is required at the hands of his surety. If it be not discharged, the surety is imprisoned: but if the surety discharges the debt, the original debtor has no further claim made upon him. Thus do reason and experience fully sanction the substitution of the innocent for the guilty, and the liberation of the guilty through the sufferings of the

^d Gen. iii. 7, 21.

^e Isai. lxi. 10.

innocent. And that this is the way for man's reconciliation with God, is abundantly testified throughout all the inspired writings. That the types are all founded in this notion, has already appeared: and the prophecies declare the same with one voice. No one can read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and doubt of this truth. "All our iniquities were laid upon him:" "he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed." The New Testament speaks the same language throughout: "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and "suffered, the just for the unjust^f." Here there is a substitution of Christ in the place of sinners: just as it is said, that peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die; that is, would die in his place, in order to preserve his life; so Christ died *for*, and in the place of, the ungodly, that by his own death he might preserve them from everlasting death^g. Yes, however the scoffing infidel may deride these things, they are the very truth of God; nor is there any other way of reconciliation for any child of man.]

2. The self-righteous Pharisee—

[Many will admit that Christ died for sinners, who yet cannot receive the idea of his righteousness being imputed to them for their justification before God. They think that, though Christ by his death atoned for our sins, we are to procure for ourselves a title to heaven by a righteousness of our own. But this cannot be; for it would give to man a ground of glorying before God, when God has expressly said that all boasting is excluded by the Gospel, and that men must glory in Christ alone. This was the great error of the Pharisees of old; and it proved a stumbling-block to them to their everlasting ruin^h. This is the great error of the Papists also, and, more than all other things, contributed to stir up the more enlightened part of the Christian world to separate themselves from the corruptions of the Church of Rome. Happy would it be, if many, who call themselves Protestants, did not in this matter go back again to the heresies which they profess to have renounced! But however pertinaciously men cling to the covenant of works, they never can obtain salvation by it: they must lay hold on the covenant of grace: they must renounce their own righteousness, even as the Apostle Paul himself did, and seek for acceptance by Christ's aloneⁱ: "in Christ shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory^k."]]

^f 1 Pet. ii. 24. and iii. 18.

^g Rom. v. 6—8.

^h Rom. ix. 31—33. and x. 1, 2.

ⁱ Phil. iii. 9.

^k Isai. xlv. 25.

3. The Antinomian professor—

[There are, it must be confessed, some who abuse the doctrine of our text, and maintain, that, because Christ is our righteousness, we need no righteousness of our own. They acknowledge indeed that Christ is our sanctification: but they suppose that his sanctification is imputed to us in the same way as his righteousness. But this is contrary both to reason and Scripture; for sanctification necessarily implies a change both of heart and life. We may easily conceive righteousness to be imputed, and that persons not righteous in themselves, may be dealt with as righteous on account of the righteousness of another: but it is not possible that a person can be made inwardly holy by the holiness of another, any more than a dead tree can be made a fruitful one by having the fruit of another tree suspended on it. And the Scripture universally requires us to be daily putting off the old man and putting on the new. If real and radical holiness be not required of us, why is it so strongly and so continually inculcated throughout all the apostolic writings? Of those who deny that the law is to the believer a rule of life, we would ask one question: What does the law require which the Gospel does not? The law requires us to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and our neighbour as ourselves; and what does the Gospel require less? What part of our duty does it dispense with? Alas! it is a fatal error to imagine that holiness is not as necessary now as formerly. Were this true, Christ would actually be a minister of sin, in that he would be vacating the obligations of God's law, which is as immutable as God himself. For our justification, it is true, we do not need any righteousness of our own; and if we were to attempt to unite our righteousness to that of Christ, we should make void the whole Gospel; and Christ would have died in vain. But to attest the reality of our faith, and manifest our love to Christ; to glorify our God on earth, and obtain a meetness for heaven, holiness is absolutely indispensable; and if we cultivate it not, even universal holiness of heart and life, we shall never see the kingdom of God.]

Having thus endeavoured to establish the doctrine of our text, we proceed,

III. 'TO IMPROVE it—

1. Let no man despair of mercy—

[What can any person want in order to his reconciliation with God, which has not been already wrought? There is a perfect atonement for your sins, and a perfect righteousness

for your justification; and the benefits of both are offered you freely, without money and without price. All that is necessary to your reconciliation on God's part, is already done by Jesus Christ: and all that remains to be done on your part, is to receive gratefully what God offers freely. Truly this is, if I may so call it, the religion of a sinner: it is suited to sinners of every class: and wherever it is received in truth, it shall prove effectual for our present peace, and our everlasting salvation.]

2. Let no man attempt to alter the plan which God himself has devised—

[We are ever leaning to the side of self-righteousness. But the righteousness which God imputes to us is, and ever must be, "a righteousness without works¹." We must be justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Why should we wish to alter this? What is it less than madness for a person destitute of one single farthing to undertake to pay ten thousand talents, when he may be freely forgiven his whole debt? Be content to be indebted wholly to the grace of God, and the mediation of the Lord Jesus: and let God alone be exalted in your salvation.]

3. Let all who embrace this salvation endeavour to adorn it—

[This is the duty of all, and the privilege of all; this is what "the grace of God teaches us;" and it is a most important end of our union with Christ^m. Are you reconciled to God? endeavour henceforth to manifest your friendship towards him in every possible way. Think not much of any thing you are called either to do or suffer for his sake. Can any thing be too much to do for one who has done so much for you, or to suffer for one who has suffered so much for you? If a man will lay down his life for an earthly friend, of how small account should you reckon any temporal interests, or even life itself, for such a friend as this? Seek to know more and more of this stupendous mystery revealed in our text: and, whilst you are filled by it with rapturous admiration, give full scope to all its transforming efficacy, till it has changed you into the very image of your God.]

¹ Rom. iv. 6.

^m Rom. vii. 4.

MMXXIV.

THE GRACE OF GOD NOT TO BE RECEIVED IN VAIN.

2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

“THE grace of God,” mentioned in the words before us, is the same with that which in the preceding context is called “the word of reconciliation:” it is the declaration, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” This is elsewhere called, “the Gospel of the grace of God;” and a wonderful display of divine grace it is: because from the first devising of this plan of reconciliation in his eternal counsels, to the last bestowment of its blessings on any child of man, it is altogether of grace: grace laid the foundation; grace raised the superstructure; and, when the head-stone shall be brought forth, the universal shout will be, “Grace, grace unto it^a.” In bringing men into a state of reconciliation with God, we ministers are fellow-labourers with God^b. Not that we do, or ever can do, any thing towards perfecting the work of Christ; (*that* was finished by him upon the cross, when he offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world;) but we are ambassadors from God, and speak to men in Christ’s stead, and thus are “workers together with God:” and in this character we beseech you, as the Apostle did the Corinthians, “not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

That we may proceed agreeably to the example set before us in our text, we shall consider,

I. The exhortation here given—

And here we shall separately notice,

1. The subject-matter of it: “Receive not the grace of God in vain”—

^a Zech. iv. 7.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 9. with the text.

[The generality of those to whom the word of reconciliation comes, hear it to no purpose. Many pay no attention at all to it, but, like Gallio of old, care for none of these things. Many hate it, and oppose it with all their might; either regarding it as foolishness, through their philosophic pride, or making it a stumbling-block, through their self-righteous habits. To all such it comes in vain, or rather, worse than in vain, seeing that it proves to them a savour of death to their more aggravated condemnation. In truth, all receive it in vain, who do not welcome it into their hearts, and conform to it in their lives. O that it might be embraced thus by all to whom it now comes! Receive it, brethren, as the most stupendous effort of Divine Wisdom for the salvation of your souls — — —]

2. The manner of it: "We, as workers together with God, beseech you"—

[We come not in our own name, when we announce these glad tidings, but in the name of our God and Saviour. We have no private ends to accomplish: it is the work of God, and that only, that we endeavour to advance: we have the same end in view that God himself had, when he sent his only dear Son into the world; the same that Christ had, when he died upon the cross: the ministry of reconciliation is committed to us; and, in the exercise of this ministry, "we are fellow-workers with God." In this capacity we might command you all: but we choose rather, like the Apostle, to use the language of entreaty: yes, "We beseech you;" in the very name and stead of Christ himself, we beseech you, that ye receive not this grace in vain. If ye will not listen to us, listen to that God in whose name we speak; and, if ye will not bow to his commands, resist not his entreaties; for it is he himself who beseeches you, by our mouth, "Be ye reconciled to God."]

To impress this exhortation the more deeply on your minds, We will call your attention to,

II. The considerations by which it is enforced—

The Apostle urges his request—

1. From the written word—

["Whatsoever was written aforetime, was written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Every promise of God throughout the Bible has a general aspect upon the Church of God, and, *in the spirit of it*, may be applied to individuals of the present day, as well as to those to whom it was more imme-

diately addressed^c. The promise before us was primarily addressed to the Messiah, assuring him of success among the Gentiles^d: but it is also fitly applicable to us; because all the blessings promised to the Head, belong also to all the members of his mystical body. To him this promise was fulfilled: in every time of need he was succoured; and in due season he was exalted above all his enemies: and so shall it be to us also, if we embrace his proffered salvation: what a delightful thought is this, that the very promise which was made to Christ, and fulfilled in him, is made to us, and shall be fulfilled in us! What an encouragement is this to receive the grace of God aright, when we are thus assured of the very same assistances and triumphs as Christ himself enjoyed!]

2. From his own inspired comment upon it—

[The accepted time, the day of salvation, was then come to the Gentile world; and we may say with truth that it is come to us also. It is come to us, because the word of reconciliation now sounds in our ears, and is proclaimed to us in the name of God himself. How long this shall continue we know not. We know that the candlestick has long since been removed from Churches, where the light of the Gospel once shone as with meridian brightness: and how soon it may be removed from us, who can tell? But it does now shine, and the grace of God is displayed amongst us in all its freeness, and in all its fulness: we are authorized therefore to say with full assurance, that it is now the accepted time respecting you. But further, it is the accepted time with you, because you are yet here to receive these tidings. With multitudes who once heard the word of reconciliation, the day of grace is passed: they are now gone into that world where offers of mercy are never sent. And how soon may this be the case with you! Many who, but a year ago, were as likely to live as you, have been summoned into the presence of their God in the past year; and many who are now in health will, before another year, be called to follow them: but who they shall be we know not: the young and vigorous have no more security than the weak and sickly: it is of the present hour only that we can speak with any measure of certainty; and it is of that only that we can say, "It is the day of salvation." But it is possible that you may still be preserved in life, and the Gospel be yet sounding in your ears, and your day of salvation may have actually already come to a close. We may, by our obstinate rejection of mercy, provoke God to withdraw his Holy Spirit, who alone can make those offers effectual for our good. He has said, that "his Spirit shall not always strive

^c Compare Josh. i. 5. with Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

^d Isai. xlix. 8.

with man :” and when he sees us obstinately bent on our own evil ways, he may say of us, as he did of Israel of old, “Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.” He has given us many awful warnings on this subject^e, and many fearful examples of the judgment actually inflicted^f. Surely, this should lead us all to “seek the Lord” whilst he *may* be found, and to call upon him whilst he *is near*. The Lord grant that we may know the day of our visitation, and “seek the things belonging to our peace, before they be for ever hid from our eyes!”]

That this subject may be yet further impressed upon your minds, consider,

1. How wonderful this grace is—

[The more we consider the gift of God’s only-begotten Son to assume our nature, and to expiate our guilt by his own blood, the more shall we be lost in wonder, love, and praise — — — And shall all this be done in vain? Shall he become sin for us, and we not seek to be made the righteousness of God in him? — — —]

2. How awful will be the consequence of rejecting it—

[Happier will Tyre and Sidon, yea, and Sodom and Gomorrah, be in the day of judgment, than those who hear and make light of these overtures of reconciliation. Think of those awful words, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”]

3. How truly blessed they are who receive the grace of God in truth—

[Well does the Psalmist say, “Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound!” Truly, they are beyond expression, and beyond conception, blessed. In this world, their “peace passeth all understanding,” and their “joy is unspeakable and glorified:” but their portion in the world to come, who shall declare? An archangel would in vain attempt to give it utterance. And shall all this belong to those who accept God’s offers of reconciliation aright? — — — Let not one of you delay to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before you — — —]

^e Prov. i. 23—31.

^f Heb. iii. 11, 18, 19. Luke xiv. 24.

MMXXV.

THE CHARACTER OF A CHRISTIAN MINISTER.

2 Cor. vi. 4—10. *In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

WHAT a portrait is here drawn! Was there ever, from the foundation of the world, an uninspired man that could pour forth an extemporaneous effusion like unto this? By much study, a man of deep thought may ramify a subject, and distribute it into a great variety of minute particulars: but the passage before us smells not of the lamp: it savours not of scientific arrangement: it is no laboured accumulation of particulars, brought forward in order to display a fund of learning, or to exhibit the resources of ingenuity: it is an effusion out of the fulness of a heart devoted to the Lord, of a heart enlarged in the service of mankind.

To enter minutely into the different expressions here brought before you, would be unprofitable in a public discourse. It is by taking the passage in the aggregate, as one vast compendious whole, that we shall best consult the edification of your souls. It refers primarily, no doubt, to St. Paul himself: but, improved in the way I propose, it will be of essential benefit to the whole Christian world: for which end, I shall take occasion, from it, to set before you *the ministerial office*.

I. As executed by him—

His whole life, after his conversion to Christianity, was one continued scene of “afflictions,” to which

he submitted with unconquerable "patience." Those two words ("afflictions" and "patience") may be considered as comprehending the whole, which in all that follows is branched out into a variety of particulars. Bearing that in remembrance, there will be found a climax throughout the whole. It will be proper to notice,

1. The circumstances in which he was placed—

[He was in one continual state of trial, as arising from different sources. Mark his trials; first, *as arising from the occurrences of every day*: he was often in such "necessities," as to want every thing that was needful for the body, and to suffer much from hunger and cold and nakedness: his "distresses," too, were often of so embarrassing a nature, that he knew not how to extricate himself from them. Mark them, next, *as arising from the treatment he met with*: multitudes were embittered against him to the last degree; sometimes loading him with "stripes;" at other times tormenting him with "imprisonments;" and at other times raging against him with such "tumults," that he was literally in danger of being torn in pieces by his infuriated enemies. Mark them, yet further, *as arising from his own zeal in the discharge of his high office*. His "labours," and "watchings," and "fastings," were doubtless sometimes imposed upon him by necessity; but they were also sometimes voluntarily undertaken, for the advancement of God's work in his own soul, and for the furthering, by means of more fervent intercession, the glorious cause he had undertaken to promote.

Now let us turn our attention to,]

2. The manner in which he conducted himself under them—

[On this he dilates, with a richness and a copiousness unrivalled perhaps in the whole world. He speaks of his patience under these diversified trials, and of his deportment under them; first, *in a way of active exertion*. He was careful, above all things, that no one should have cause to impeach the "pureness" of his principles; and he strove to act with such judgment, that his "knowledge" of God's will should be evident to all, and be exercised to the uttermost, for the benefit of all. At the same time, he took care, by his "long-suffering," to shew that he could not easily be stimulated to resentment against his persecutors: on the contrary, he lost no opportunity of requiting by "kindness" the injuries they inflicted; evincing, by this, that he was under the influence of "the Holy Ghost," and actuated altogether by "unfeigned love" to every child of man. "The word of truth" was con-

stantly upon his lips; and it was attended always, in a greater or less degree, by “the power of God” to the souls of men: whilst, in consequence of being clad with “the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,” he was enabled to defy all the assaults, whether of men or devils.

At the same time, he manifested his superiority to all his difficulties, *in a way of patient submission*. Passing through “honour and dishonour,” he shewed that he was neither elated with the one, nor depressed with the other. With some he was an object of “evil report,” and with others of “good report;” some calumniating him in every possible way; and others exalting his character in terms of the highest approbation: but he was alike unmoved both by the one and the other. What if he was accounted a “deceiver,” who took advantage of the weakness or wickedness of others, to impose upon them, and thereby to advance his own interests? This did not move him, whilst he knew himself to be “true,” and a faithful minister of the truths which he had been commissioned to declare. The proud looked down upon him with contempt, as one altogether “unknown,” and unworthy of regard; whilst, in fact, he was “well known” by the many blessings which he imparted wheresoever he went. It was supposed, inasmuch as he was “dying” daily, that his course would soon be finished: but yet, contrary to all human expectation, though sometimes left for dead, he was “yet alive.” He was “chastened” with all imaginable severity by magistrates, on different occasions; yet was he “not killed.” Viewed according to his outward appearance, he was in a most “sorrowful” condition; yet was he, in reality, “always rejoicing” in the testimony of a good conscience, and in the favour of his God. He was “poor,” no doubt, and bereft at times even of the most common necessities of life; but yet, in the whole course of his ministry, he was “making many rich,” yea, richer far than all the monarchs upon earth could ever make them. Finally, he was as one “having nothing;” and yet, both as to his present enjoyments and future prospects, he was as one “possessing all things;” so that, if the whole world could be given him, it would not add one atom to his wealth.

What a surprising description is this! How remote from all the conceptions of the natural man! yet how exactly suited to the experience of every faithful minister on earth!]

Leaving now these views of the Apostle’s ministry to the contemplation of those who are called to minister in holy things, I will proceed to speak of it,

II. As appointed for us—

Let us conceive of the Apostle as set apart to this office by Almighty God, and, as informed, at the very time of his appointment to it, "how great things he should suffer" for his Master's sake; and let us further bear in mind, that all who are in every age ordained to the office of the ministry are called to a measure of the same experience; and how strongly will it impress our minds with,

1. The exceeding great value of the soul—

[The souls of men were "perishing for lack of knowledge." God, in his mercy, determined to set apart an order of men to instruct them, and to guide them into all truth. But the wickedness of men would "not endure sound doctrine:" they would hate the light, and endeavour to extinguish it, wheresoever it should appear. This, however, should tend rather to the furtherance, than to the obstruction, of God's gracious purposes. It should tend to complete the work of his grace in the souls of his servants, whom he should thus send forth; and it should serve to illustrate the power of his grace, in upholding them under circumstances of such peculiar trial. Conceive now of persons so separated and so appointed, in every age, for the benefit of mankind; and what an idea will it give us of the value of their souls! What; shall strangers, unconnected with the world, except as being partakers of the same nature, be raised up to devote themselves to such labours, and to undergo such sufferings for *us*? to warn *us*, instruct *us*, encourage *us*, and lead *us* into the way of peace? Verily, then, the interests of an immortal soul are not of so little importance as the world at large seem to imagine. Indeed, brethren, if we are bound, by our high office, to live as the Apostle lived, and in the whole of our ministerial career to follow him for the benefit of your souls, it can never be that you should be at liberty to neglect your own souls, or to manifest less concern for yourselves, than we are to exercise for you. Doubtless, that which most marks the value of an immortal soul, is the gift of God's only-begotten Son to die for you: but next to that, is the appointment of an order of men, who are to go with their lives in their hands, and endure all that an ungrateful world can inflict, for the purpose of "turning you from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God." *Read carefully the text in this view; and then say, "He did all this for me, and suffered all this for me: and then you will see what is that measure of zeal which you are called to exercise for your own souls."*]

2. The true nature of the Christian warfare—

[There was nothing in the Apostle's experience which we ourselves are not, according to our measure, called to undergo: and we ourselves must *approve ourselves servants* of God, precisely in the same way as he "*approved himself a minister.*" *In degree*, our trials may differ from his; but *in substance* they will be the same. We may not be *called to stripes* and imprisonments for the Lord's sake: but we should be *prepared for* them, if it should please God that persecution should rage against his Church, as it has done, not in the apostolic age only, but in ages not *very* remote from that in which we live; and in this country too, not less than in other kingdoms. But whatever be the measure of our trials, our spirit must be the same as his. We must be proof against all the assaults of our enemies; "not being overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good." As to all the contempt that shall be poured upon us, or the privations we may be called to undergo, they must be as nothing in our eyes, by reason of our enjoyment of the Divine presence that bears us up above them, and our prospect of the Divine glory, that will compensate for all the labour or suffering that ever we could endure, if our lives were protracted for ten thousand years. The Apostle expressly calls upon us to follow him: and to "be imitators of him, even as he was of Christ^a." And I would call on every one of you to *set before your eyes the pattern as it is here drawn*; and to aspire after the highest conformity to it that God shall enable you to attain.]

3. The great blessing of a faithful ministry—

[What would the world have been, if no such persons as the Apostle had been raised up to instruct them? See what the heathen were, as described by St. Paul in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans; and what the Jews themselves were, as described in the second chapter. Or see what heathen countries are at this day, yea, and Christian countries too, where the Gospel is not preached with fidelity and power. Then look at the Churches formed by the Apostles, and at Churches even at this day, where Christ is preached in sincerity and truth. This will shew how great a blessing is a faithful ministry. But let us go no further than to the Apostle Paul; and compare his picture as drawn previous to his conversion, with that which is drawn in the passage before us: does not the difference strike us as truly wonderful? Yet it was all formed by the grace of God operating upon his soul, through the principles he had imbibed. And, permit me to say, that I consider my ministry as of no use, any further than it operates to the production of the same change in you. If it

^a 1 Cor. x. 32, 33. with xi. 1.

have wrought on any to their conversion, let them be thankful for it; and strive more and more to shew its power, by an entire conformity to the Apostle both in heart and life. But if it have not, (and how many of you are there that are in this awful predicament!) remember your sad responsibility to God; and tremble, lest that, which God has sent you for your salvation, prove only an occasion of your more aggravated condemnation!]

ADDRESS^b—

^b This must of course vary according to the audience before whom the subject is brought. If it be on the occasion of an *Ordination*, or *Visitation*, the clergy must be exhorted to consider what they have undertaken, and to fulfil it. If the subject be before a common audience on the *First Sunday in Lent* (the Epistle for the day), the people may be exhorted to avail themselves of the privileges they enjoy; and to pray for their minister, that he may be enabled to approve himself faithful to God, and to them.

MMXXVI.

PARADOXICAL EXPERIENCE.

2 Cor. vi. 10. *As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*

THEY who form their opinions on mere outward appearances, will almost invariably err. But in nothing will they be more mistaken, than in their judgment of the Christian state. The experience of one that is converted to God is a perfect paradox: and they who are strangers to it, evince that they yet need to learn the very first principles of true religion.

St. Paul is enumerating a great variety of things whereby he had “approved himself a faithful minister of God:” and after a multitude of other paradoxes, he comes at last to those in the text. Doubtless, they had a more immediate reference to his own state, and, in some points of view, were applicable to him alone: but in other respects, they are equally true of “all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”

We shall take occasion from these words to shew,

I. How poor the Christian is in himself—

The bitter persecutions, the painful wants, and the continued load of care, under which the Apostle laboured, might well make him sorrowful. But if we drink not of his cup in these respects, there yet are other grounds on which we may be called, like the Laodiceans, “wretched, and miserable, and poor^a.”

1. We are destitute of all that is truly desirable—

[The man who wants all the necessities of life, does not feel himself more destitute than the Christian.

How poor is he that has *no righteousness* to justify him before God! Yet the Christian has none *in himself*; he has nothing whereon he can rely, no, not any more than the fallen angels themselves^b.

How poor is he that has *no strength* whereby to serve God! Yet this is the Christian's condition. If the thinking of a good thought would save him, he has not *of himself* a sufficiency to do it^c.

How poor is he who has *no wisdom* to guide him one step of his way towards heaven! Yet thus destitute is the Christian. If he should in any one instance lean to his own understanding, he would as surely err, as if he should attempt blindfold to explore the most intricate path^d.

In short if he had attained the eminence of Paul himself, he still must say, “In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth *no good thing*.”^e]

2. We have continual cause of sorrow—

[Numberless are the conflicts which the Christian has to maintain with his indwelling *corruptions*: and too frequently he receives a wound that fills him with the acutest anguish^f.

Many are the seasons too when his soul is “in heaviness through manifold *temptations*”^g: and when, through the *hidings of God's face*, he “walks in darkness and has no light^h.”

Supposing him ever so free from persecution, still he has in these things abundant reason for grief. Well may he on these accounts exclaim, with the Apostle, “O wretched man that I am!”ⁱ]

But the Christian's poverty is rather a subordinate point in the text; we therefore pass on to shew more fully,

^a Rev. iii. 17. ^b Isai. lxiv. 6.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^d Jer. x. 23. Prov. iii. 5, 6.

^e Rom. vii. 18.

^f Rom. vii. 23.

^g 1 Pet. i. 6.

^h Ps. lxxxviii. 14—16.

ⁱ Rom. vii. 24.

II. How rich he is in Christ—

With respect to this, every Christian is on the same footing with the Apostle himself—

1. He has an inexhaustible fulness of all good—

[Is not he rich, that has *reconciliation with God*; and that has “all his iniquities cast into the depths of the sea?”

Is not he rich, that has *liberty of access to God* at all times, and that can obtain, day and night, *the manifestations of his presence*, and the *testimonies of his love*?

Is not he rich, who, besides the present aids and consolations of God's Spirit, has *an assured prospect of eternal happiness and glory*?

Yet this, and more than this, does the Christian possess in Christ. “All things are his, when he is Christ's^k.” He is “complete in Christ^l,” he is “enriched with unsearchable riches^m,” and “blessed with all spiritual and eternal blessingsⁿ.”

Compare with these things all the wealth of kingdoms; and say, whether it be not lighter than vanity itself.]

2. He has an incessant ground of joy and glorying—

[Let the Christian be in the most afflictive circumstances with respect to the things of time and sense, and yet may he rejoice in Christ.

What an inexpressible comfort must it be to him to contemplate *the virtue of his sacrifice—the efficacy of his intercession—the sufficiency of his grace—the extent of his promises*—and lastly, *his inviolable truth and faithfulness*! May not he well adopt the language of the text, “I am sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; having nothing, and yet possessing all things?” Yes; it is his privilege to “rejoice in the Lord alway^o,” and that too, “with joy unspeakable and glorified^p.”]

INFER—

1. What an exalted character is the true Christian!

[The men of this world are altogether dependent on outward circumstances for their happiness; and, if their cistern fail, they are bereft of all. But the Christian is independent of every thing here below. He may be deprived of health and liberty, of possessions and friends; but nothing can hinder his communion with Christ. Neither men nor devils can intercept the communications of heaven; which, for the most

^k 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

^l Col. ii. 10.

^m Eph. iii. 8.

ⁿ Eph. i. 3.

^o Phil. iv. 4.

^p 1 Pet. i. 8.

part, are increased, in proportion as other comforts are withdrawn^q.

Let Christians then shew by their contempt of this world, that they are born from above; and prove in the midst of all their tribulations, that they possess indeed the magnanimity imputed to them.]

2. How pitiable is the state of unconverted men!

[If they be poor and afflicted in a temporal view, they have nothing to sustain their drooping spirits. If, on the contrary, they be rich and gay, still their happiness is but empty, transient, delusive. In a little time they will be poor, and miserable beyond conception. In their very best estate therefore they are objects of pity and compassion: they may possess much, but yet are destitute of all things; they may be often rejoicing, but have continued occasion for grief and sorrow.

O that they were wise, and would consider this! O that they would begin to seek an interest in Christ, that through him their state might be reversed, and that they might participate the Christian's lot!]

3. What a blessed work is that of the ministry!

[The Apostle gloried in this, that "though poor, he made many rich." And is not this the one intent of our ministry? Is it not that for which we were consecrated to the service of the sanctuary? Has the Christian preacher no better end in view than to display his talents, and obtain applause? Surely, if we have been anointed with an heavenly unction, and ever learned the true nature of our office, our only desire is to "win souls:" and, as that is the scope of our labours, so, when we behold one and another coming to the possession of the true riches, we consider our success as the most glorious of all rewards^r.

O that every minister might view his office in this light; and every faithful preacher be thus recompensed for his labours!]

^q 2 Cor. i. 5.

^r 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

MMXXVII.

EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL IN ENLARGING THE HEART.

2 Cor. vi. 11—13. *O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. Now, for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.*

THE ministers of the Gospel sustain an office characterized in Scripture by the most exalted terms. They are ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ: they address men in the name, and in the very place, of God himself^a: and they are in this respect fellow-workers with God^b. But, though they are at liberty, and indeed are bound, to “magnify *their office*,” they are not at liberty to magnify *themselves*: nor, indeed, will they be disposed to do so: they know, that, whilst they bear for the good of others an inestimable “treasure, they are themselves but earthen vessels^d:” and, if they glory at all, they can “glory only of their infirmities,” by means of which the Lord Jesus Christ is honoured, and his work advanced^e. It is to these that the Apostle, in the passage now under our consideration, refers, as the proofs of his appointment to, and his fidelity in, the apostolic office: and so ample is his enumeration of the difficulties and trials to which he had been subjected in the discharge of his duty, that he apologizes, as it were, for the fulness of his description; and entreats his Corinthian converts to exercise towards him the same disposition which he was at this instant exercising towards them.

The words which we have read to you will afford me occasion to shew,

I. How the Gospel enlarges the heart of a faithful minister—

To the servants of Christ is committed the ministry of reconciliation—

[*In this respect*, a common minister is on a par with an Apostle. St. Paul himself could declare nothing, but that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; not imputing their trespasses unto them:” and those blessed tidings we also are privileged to bear; as we are, also, to “beseech men, in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God.” And this office I will now perform, if peradventure God may give his blessing to the word, and bring the soul of any one amongst you into a state of favour and acceptance with himself———]

^a 2 Cor. v. 20.

^b ver. 1.

^c Rom. xi. 13.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 30.

In the discharge of this high office they have many difficulties to encounter—

[The Apostle here, with astonishing enlargement, sets them forth, and *adduces them as evidences of his fidelity to God and man.* He had “approved himself as a minister of God” *in the diversity and intenseness of his sufferings*; “in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings.” He had approved himself, also, *in the whole of his spirit and conduct*; “by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” He had given yet further evidence of his fidelity, *in the different kinds of reception he had met with*; “by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as a deceiver, yet true; as unknown, yet well known; as dying, yet, behold, he lived; as chastened, yet, contrary to all human expectation, not killed.” Lastly, he had shewn himself a true minister of God, *in the supports and consolations that had been administered to him*; “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” The eloquence of this passage has perhaps never been surpassed: and it proceeded, not from the richness of his imagination, but from the fulness of his heart; as he says: “O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.”

And were these things peculiar to the Apostle? Has not every faithful minister *a measure* of the same? What, if we have not to experience bonds and imprisonments, have we not to go “through honour and dishonour; through evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, yet well known?” Yes, and under the lowest pressure of adverse circumstances, we trust we can say, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”]

But difficulties, of whatever kind, are of no account with them, if only they may be rendered subservient to the progress of the Gospel, and the salvation of immortal souls—

[It was not in a way of complaint, and much less in a way of boasting, that the Apostle dilated thus on his experience: no; it was for the purpose of convincing the Corinthians that he longed for their welfare, and accounted not his life dear unto him, if he might by any means promote their eternal happiness. He had himself obtained, by the Gospel, reconciliation with God; and he panted to make them also

partakers of the same benefit. This hope it was that made him so indefatigable in all his labours, and so invincible under all his sufferings.

And I may safely say, that the same blessed hope will animate every faithful minister to tread in the Apostle's steps, and to be a follower of him, as he was of Christ.]

In this address of St. Paul to the Corinthians, we yet further see,

II. What reciprocity of feeling he may hope to find amongst those to whom he ministers—

If this experience attends a faithful *ministration* of the Gospel, so does it also, in some degree, a faithful *reception* of it: and if it should be welcomed by the preacher as an evidence of his fidelity, so should it also be welcomed by his hearers as a testimony borne by God himself in their favour. I call you then, beloved, to shew a measure of that enlargement which was so conspicuous and unrivalled in the Apostle Paul. To every one of you I say, Resemble him.

1. Let your reception of the Gospel be alike cordial—

[It is as worthy of *your* reception, as it was of *his*; and will be as rich a source of blessings to *you* as ever it was to *him* — — —]

2. Let your devotion to it be alike entire—

[See how entirely he devoted himself to God, from the very first moment that the Lord Jesus revealed himself unto him. "He conferred not with flesh and blood." Having asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" he knew of no will, but God's; no way, but that which the Lord himself prescribed. Be ye, brethren, alike upright in the service of Him who "has reconciled you to God by the blood of his cross." "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price: therefore ye must glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are his" — — —]

3. Let your zeal for it be alike ardent—

[In the whole passage we have read to you, you have heard what labours he undertook, and what sufferings he endured, in order to diffuse the knowledge of that Gospel which he had found so beneficial to his own soul. And shall not "the love of Christ constrain you" also? Shall any labour be accounted too great, or any suffering too severe, if you may

be instrumental to the advancing the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth? — — —]

4. Let your sacrifices for it be alike welcomed—

[By the cross of Christ, in which St. Paul gloried, "the world was crucified to him, and he unto the world^f:" and he regarded all that it contained, just as a man dying on a cross would regard it. Yea, in his Master's service he was ready to welcome martyrdom as an occasion of self-congratulation and joy^g. A noble example! Seek to imitate it, my beloved brethren; and instead of repining at any thing ye may suffer for the Gospel's sake, "count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;" and "rejoice, if ye are counted worthy to suffer for your Lord's sake" — — —]

And now let me, in CONCLUSION, "speak to you as my children"—

[Would to God I could say, that "ye have never been straitened in us." Alas! we are conscious that in our ministrations we have often been cold and dead. But, on the present occasion, we hope that, in some small degree, we may adopt the Apostle's words; and, "in recompence for the same," we would add with him, "Be ye also enlarged." Truly, if you had not been "straitened in your own bowels," many, many blessings would have flowed down upon you, which yet have been withheld, because ye were not sufficiently alive to the importance of the subject propounded to you — — — You well know, that a vessel with a contracted opening receives but little of the showers of heaven, in comparison of one that presents to them a wide and expanded orifice: and thus it fares with many, who, through prejudice or worldly-mindedness, have their hearts almost closed to the glad tidings of the Gospel. O that ye might henceforth be enlarged, so as to come with minds fully prepared to receive at God's hands all that his dear Son has purchased for you, and all that his own unbounded mercy is ready to bestow! Come to the house of God as rebels that have subjected yourselves to God's heavy displeasure. Come as penitents, imploring mercy at his hands. Come as believers, that are persuaded of the fulness of the salvation provided for you in Christ, and of the willingness of God to bestow it on every believing penitent. In a word, Come to hear the testimony of God, in the manner, and in the spirit, that St. Paul went forth to announce it to his hearers. Let but this feeling be reciprocal, (the Lord grant it may be more and more found in me!) and then *we* shall not speak in vain, nor will *you* hear in vain.]

^f Gal. vi. 14.

^g Phil. ii. 17, 18.

MMXXVIII.

SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD ENJOINED.

2 Cor. vi. 14—18. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? and what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

A MINISTER never appears, to young people especially, in so forbidding an aspect, as when he is circumscribing men's intercourse with the world, and marking with precision the spirit that characterizes the true Christian in relation to the things of time and sense. Many on such an occasion are ready to account him an enemy to their happiness, and to censure him as a promoter of gloom and melancholy. But where do we find the Apostle pouring out such copious streams of love, as in the chapter before us? So accumulated were the expressions of his regard, that he thought it almost necessary to apologize for the more than ordinary effusions of his heart: "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged." Yet in that very frame of mind did he give the directions in our text. As a parent in his dying hour would most tenderly guard his children against the temptations which were most likely to draw them aside from the paths of virtue and happiness, so does the Apostle on this occasion instruct and caution his Corinthian converts: and with a measure of the same spirit we would now proceed to the consideration of the subject before us.

That we may bring it before you with the greater perspicuity, we shall shew,

I. What is that separation from the world which Christianity requires—

It must be confessed, that the expressions in our text are often quoted and urged in too unqualified a manner, and without a due consideration of the difference between the heathen world, amongst whom the Corinthians dwelt, and the professedly Christian world, amongst whom we dwell. Certainly a greater measure of separation was necessary for them than for us: inasmuch as the dangers to which intercourse with heathens would subject them, were greater than those to which we are exposed by intercourse with those who profess the same faith with ourselves. Even they were not debarred from the courtesies of social life^a, nor from some degree of intercourse even with the most ungodly and profane^b: much less are we from such a measure of communication with them, as is necessary for the discharge of our civil and social duties. But still we must “not be unequally yoked with them:”

1. We must not have fellowship with them in any of their evil deeds—

[It is probable that in the caution here given, the Apostle had some respect to idolatrous ceremonies, and idol feasts, in which a true Christian could not consistently take any part. Being himself “the temple of God, he could not have any communion with idols.” Not but that the prohibition must extend also to every kind of evil, as well as to idolatry: for, in another place, the same Apostle speaks of “uncleanness, and covetousness, and foolish talking, and jesting, as bringing down the wrath of God upon all the children of disobedience;” and then adds, “Be not ye therefore partakers with them:” and again, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them^c.” This therefore is a law unto us, and to the Church of God in all ages, that, though we may to a certain degree unite with ungodly men in things that are indifferent, we must not unite with them in any thing that is evil, however much it may be sanctioned by the customs and usages of the world: “we must not follow a multitude to do evil.”]

2. We must not form any close connexion with them—

^a 1 Cor. x. 27.

^b 1 Cor. v. 9, 10.

^c Eph. v. 3—7, 11.

[Under the law, men were forbidden to sow their fields with different kinds of seed, or to wear clothes that were formed of different kinds of materials, as of woollen and linen: nor were they to yoke together an ox, which was a clean animal, with an ass, which was unclean^d. The import of these different laws was the same: they were all intended to intimate, that in the Lord's people there should be a perfect simplicity of mind, and an entire freedom from all mixture of evil. It is to the yoking of the clean and unclean together, that the Apostle refers in our text: and his illustration of it is beautiful. He represents believers as the temple of the Lord, in which nothing but what is holy should be found. All the vessels of that temple must be holy; and all the priests that officiate in it must be holy also. In confirmation of this he quotes a passage from the Prophet Isaiah, where the priests in Babylon are enjoined to keep themselves from every species of defilement, in daily and hourly expectation that the order for their return to their own country shall be issued, and that they may be in a fit state to bear the vessels of the Lord, which would be restored by Cyrus for the service of the sanctuary at Jerusalem^e. In such a state must all Christians, who are a holy priesthood, keep themselves, if they would please and honour God: they must "come out from among the ungodly, and be separate, and not touch any thing that is unclean." In Babylon they must be, till the time of their release from it: but they must keep themselves from all close connexion with the people of it, and be in heart and mind as separate as the vessels of the sanctuary are from any profane use. The Apostle's direction, not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, is justly urged against that most fatal of all connexions, the union of a believer with an unbeliever in the indissoluble bonds of marriage. This union on the part of a believer, is to be formed "only in the Lord^f," and with such a partner as will prove an helpmate for the soul. But the same rule should as far as possible be observed in every other relation of life, that so the spiritual person may not augment his difficulties in the way to heaven.]

3. We must not cultivate any unnecessary intimacy with them—

[What is necessary for the discharge of our social duties must, as we have before said, be allowed: yet even that is rather to be submitted to from necessity than be sought from choice. The whole of the Apostle's argument extends to this. He supposes, that, as "the whole world lieth in wickedness," it is almost impossible for a believer to be much in union with

^d Deut. xxii. 9—11.

^e Isai. lii. 11.

^f 1 Cor. vii. 39.

it without contracting some defilement. Hence he says, in reference to all who would divert us from the path of duty, or impede in any way our spiritual progress, "Come out from among them and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing." Aware how soon "evil communications will corrupt good manners," his advice is like that of Solomon, "enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men: avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away^g." In a word, the true line of conduct seems to be that which a physician would follow in the time of a pestilential disease. He would go amongst the infected from a sense of duty, and with a desire to do them good: but he would not make them his companions, nor stay longer with them than his duty, and their necessities, required: and both before and after his visit, as well as during his intercourse with them, he would use all proper means to preserve himself from the contagion which he had reason to apprehend.]

Such being the separation from the world which Christianity requires, we proceed to shew,

II. Whence the necessity for it arises—

On this part of the subject the Apostle speaks very fully: and, because of the perfect conviction of his own mind, he addresses us in a way of appeal, determining to make us judges in our own cause.

The difference between the believer and unbeliever he supposes to be as great as between light and darkness, or Christ and Belial. And though this at first appears harsh and extravagant, it is really no exaggeration, if only we consider, that the one is a partaker of the Divine nature and a child of God, whilst the other is altogether carnal, a child of disobedience, a child of Satan. The question then is, What real fellowship can there be between persons so dissimilar? Let any one think what a total difference exists,

1. In their taste and sentiments—

[The believer affects only heavenly things. As for the things of time and sense, he is dying to them daily, and suffers them to have as little influence as possible upon his mind. He is convinced that every thing in this world is lighter than vanity itself; and that the care of the soul is the one thing

^g Prov. iv. 14, 15.

needful. To have a sense of the Divine presence, and an assured hope of dwelling with God for ever, to see sin increasingly mortified in his soul, and the image of God progressively advancing there, this is happiness in his estimation; and it is the only happiness he desires. But how different are the taste and sentiments of the merely natural man! All his affections are set on earthly things: nor has he any wish beyond them. If he could have an uninterrupted enjoyment of health, and wealth, and honour, he would wish for no other heaven: he would be well satisfied with his state, though he had never one glimpse of God's countenance, nor one foretaste of the heavenly glory.

Now we ask, What communion can there be between persons so totally discordant from each other? They live in a different element; and what is life to the one, is to the other death.]

2. In their habits and pursuits—

[The believer delights in the word of God and prayer. Meditation on heavenly things is the very food of his soul. "The life which he now lives in the flesh, he lives by the faith of the Son of God, who has loved him and given himself for him." To receive out of his Saviour's fulness more abundant communications of grace and peace, and to glorify him more in the midst of a wicked world, this is his daily desire, habit, and pursuit. But is it thus with the unbeliever? Does he appear like a man running in a race, and determined to win the prize? No; there is no resemblance between the two characters: and, if yoked together, their union would be like that of a reptile and a bird: the reptile fetters the bird to the earth, whilst every motion of the bird, when aspiring after liberty and affecting its wonted flights, incommodes and pains the reptile: and the sooner a separation is effected, the better will each of them be pleased.

Now these things are by the Apostle made a matter of appeal. And we also appeal to yourselves respecting them: Is there not, in profession at least, this contrariety between the characters, and, as far as the believer acts agreeably to his profession, does it not exist in practice also? Here then is abundant reason for the separation before spoken of: for it is impossible for the believer to derive either comfort or benefit from an intercourse that damps all his best feelings, and obstructs all his best interests. And his true way to be holy and happy is, to "Come out from the world, and be separate, and if possible, not to touch the unclean thing."]

Nor will this separation be thought painful, if only we bear in mind—

III. The honour which God will confer on all who steadfastly maintain it—

The people of the world, in order to retain the believer in a state of bondage, hold out to him the benefits of which a separation from them will deprive him—

[They tell him of his reputation, which will suffer; and of his interests, which will be impaired by what *they call* his needless singularity — — — Perhaps, and indeed not uncommonly, his own parents will be the most forward to discourage him in his heavenly course, and “his greatest foes will be those of his own household — — —”]

But the encouragement here afforded him is sufficient to outweigh it all—

[What astonishing words are these! “I will receive you, and be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” What need we care about being cast out by men, if we are received by God? yea, if even disowned and disinherited by earthly parents, what loss do we sustain, if God himself acknowledge us as his sons and daughters, and provide an inheritance for us worthy of that high relation? Think of the sweet access which a child has to his parent, the delightful confidence he has in his love, and the full assurance he enjoys of all suitable provision in the time of need. This, and infinitely more than this, does the believer enjoy in the presence of his God: and beyond all this he looks forward to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Say, believer, how small are thy privations, when such are thine enjoyments! how contemptible are thy losses, when such are thy gains! — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are just entering on the divine life—

[“Let every one who sets himself to seek his God, prepare his soul for temptation.” Yes, beloved, if you will be followers of Christ, you must have some cross to bear. The servant cannot be above his lord: if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household. Be content then to have it so. Do not imagine that you can ever reconcile the ungodly to the ways of God. If you will maintain friendship with them you must renounce your friendship with him. “You cannot serve God and Mammon:” and even a wish to do so is in God’s estimation constructive treason^h. You think perhaps to do them good:

^h Jam. iv. 4. See the Greek, and mark well the import of every word.

but you are infinitely more likely to be injured by them, than to impart any solid benefit to them¹. They must come to you; not you to them. To attempt to unite with them is folly and madness. You do not meet on equal terms. There is nothing that they will not say and do to draw you from God: but they will not suffer you to say or do any thing to draw them to God. They will propose to you to join with them in their amusements: but if you were to propose to them to join with you in reading the word of God and prayer, they would pronounce you mad. Come out then from among them and be separate, even as your Lord and Saviour did. "Ye are not of the world," says our Lord, "even as I am not of the world." Let this saying be verified in you: and let such be your love to his cross, that by means of it "the world may be crucified unto you, and you unto the world."]

2. Those who have made some progress in the Divine life—

[Do not imagine that, because the world have not hitherto prevailed to draw you back to them, you need not be on your guard against them. Remember Demas: "Remember Lot's wife." The world will never cease from their efforts, because, whilst you walk steadfastly with God, you are a reproach to them. Like Noah, you, by your lively faith, and practical fear, "condemn the world." Your own experience will be a sufficient warning to you in future. You have doubtless at times been drawn into a closer intimacy with the world than was expedient: and what, I would ask, has been the effect of it? Have you found the same satisfaction in their vanities that you have found in holy exercises? Have you not found that fellowship with them has invariably tended to interrupt your fellowship with God? When you have been walking closely with God, you have known somewhat of what is meant by those words, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them:" but have you ever been taught this by communion with the world? Your own consciousness will give the best answer to these questions. Let past experience teach you; for it is in perfect unison with the word of God, that to be "holy, and to be harmless, you must be separate from sinners." Let your one concern then be, to "present yourselves as living sacrifices unto God, which is your reasonable service." And "be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." And be assured, that if, like the little remnant in the Church of Sardis, you keep your garments undefiled, you shall walk with God in white, approved by him as conquerors, and rewarded with "a crown of glory that fadeth not away."]

¹ See Hagg. ii. 12, 13.

MMXXIX.

SANCTIFICATION WROUGHT BY THE PROMISES.

2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

CHRISTIANITY, if viewed aright, is a remedy suited to the necessities of fallen man. Man has lost both the favour and the image of God: and the Gospel restores him to both: to his favour first, and afterwards to his image. The promise made to Adam in Paradise, that "the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head," was given without any preparation of heart on Adam's part, yea, altogether unsolicited and unsought. It was, in fact, not given to Adam personally; but was rather a part of the judgment denounced against the serpent that had beguiled him^a. Thus, in the passage before us, the promises in the close of the preceding chapter are given freely to the sons of men: and the sanctification that follows it, is to be the fruit and effect of the promises apprehended by them, and applied to their souls.

To put this matter in a clear light, we shall shew,

I. The nature and extent of the sanctification required of us—

Sanctification is not a mere removal of evil from the soul, but a positive renovation of the whole man. It is set forth in our text as,

1. The mortification of all sin—

[As man consists of two parts, flesh and spirit, so sin resides in both, and defiles both: and is therefore distinguished into fleshly and spiritual filthiness; the former assimilating us to the beasts, and the latter to that great enemy of God and man, the devil: as our Lord has said, "Ye are of your father the devil; and the lusts of your father ye will do^b." By "the filthiness of the flesh," we understand, all those sins which take their rise from, and are acted by, the body; as uncleanness, intemperance, sloth. By "the filthiness of the

^a Gen. iii. 14, 15.

^b John viii. 44.

spirit," we understand, those sins which are more independent of the body, and have their proper residence in the mind; as pride, envy, malice, wrath, revenge; discontent, covetousness, deceit; impenitence, unbelief, and numberless other evils. But from all of these we are to be cleansed. If one be retained willingly, deliberately, habitually, it will so defile, as utterly to destroy, the soul: as God has said, "If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy^c." It is to no purpose for any to plead, that God has given them passions, and that they are not able to restrain them; for God will enable us to restrain them, if we cry to him for help: He has declared, that "his grace shall be sufficient for us." Neither, on the other hand, must any one think well of himself, merely because he does not indulge any gross corporeal lusts: for he may be "fulfilling the desires of the mind to a vast extent," even whilst he restrains "those of the flesh^d;" and the indulgence of spiritual lusts is no less hateful in the sight of God, than the gratifications which are more disgraceful in our eyes. A proud Christian, a passionate Christian, a discontented Christian, or an unbelieving Christian, is as palpable a contradiction in terms, as a drunken or a lewd Christian. Evil tempers and dispositions of whatever kind must be subdued and mortified; if but one reign in the soul, we are Christians in name only, and not in deed and in truth: for "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts^e." Would to God that professing Christians would more attentively consider this! It is a grievous mistake to imagine, that any notions however scriptural, or any virtues however specious, will be of any avail, as long as one evil temper remains in us unmortified and unsubdued. "If we regard iniquity in our hearts (of whatever kind it be), the Lord will not hear us."]

2. The cultivation of universal holiness—

[Not contented with "putting off the old man," we are to be continually "putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness:" we are to be "renewed in the spirit of our mind^f." This is an expression that deserves to be deeply considered: for it contains the very essence of real sanctification. We must "put on the Lord Jesus Christ^g," and have in ourselves the very "mind that was in him^h." Mark his every disposition; his delight in God's presence, dependence on his care, and zeal for his glory; his self-denying habits of every kind, and, at the same time, his

^c 1 Cor. iii. 17.

^d Eph. ii. 3.

^e Gal. v. 24.

^f Eph. iv. 23, 24.

^g Rom. xiii. 14. Gal. iii. 27.

^h Phil. ii. 5.

patience and meekness, his compassion and love towards the children of men, even towards his most inveterate enemies: these are to be the dispositions which we are to cultivate, and in which we are to grow up even to perfectionⁱ. Whatever we have attained, we are to “forget it all, and press forward for more^k,” and to “grow up into him in all things as our living Head^l.” All this we are to do “in the fear of God.” *This expression must be particularly marked*: for in “the fear of God” the perfection of holiness consists. By “the fear of God,” I understand that tenderness of conscience, and watchfulness of mind, that guards against even a thought which would be displeasing to God. There is a susceptibility of impression (such as exists in the apple of the eye when touched by the smallest mote in the air), which we should keep alive in our hearts in reference to sin, and have in uninterrupted exercise. In this the Lord Jesus Christ himself pre-eminently excelled, being “of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord^m,” and it is by this that God has engaged to perfect his work within us, “causing us to fear him for ever,” and “putting his fear into our hearts that we may not depart from himⁿ.”

This is the crown of all Christian graces and attainments: without which nothing is of any value. It is the lowered tint which marks the ripeness and maturity of our choicest fruit: it is that by which the man of God is perfected, and the image of God is completed in the soul.]

The mention of the promises in connexion with this, leads me to shew,

II. The use of the promises in the production of it—

St. Peter tells us, that “by the promises we are made partakers of the Divine nature^o,” and to the same effect does St. Paul speak in the words before us. It is by the promises that we are to accomplish the task assigned us in the text. For this blessed work they are well fitted: for they operate,

1. In a way of motive—

[Who can contemplate the promises in the preceding context, and not feel his obligations to Almighty God so great as to outweigh every other consideration under heaven? Does

ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 23.

^k Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^l Eph. iv. 15.

^m Isai. xi. 2, 3.

ⁿ Jer. xxxii. 38—40. and Isai. xi. 2, 3. These passages should be carefully noticed and compared in this view.

^o 2 Pet. i. 4.

God promise to "dwell and walk in us" as in his temple? Does he engage to "be our God," as much as if there were no other creature in the universe besides ourselves that had any interest in him? Does he declare that he will both "receive us," and act towards us, as the most indulgent Father towards his own beloved "sons and daughters?" Is all this promised to us freely, even to all who will separate themselves from an ungodly world, and seek his face? Who can contemplate this, and not instantly inquire, "What shall I render to the Lord for all these benefits?" Who can have such a hope in him, and not endeavour to "purify himself, even as God is pure?" It is thus that Paul felt his obligations to the Lord; and it is from the consideration of them that he urges us to an unreserved devotedness of ourselves to God, assuring us that the mercies conferred upon us render an entire consecration of ourselves to him "a reasonable service".]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Any one who should merely contemplate the greatness of the work assigned him, would sit down in despair: "How shall I hope so to cleanse myself from all sin, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God?" But in the promises, he finds ample ground of confidence and joy. "What! has God freely given to me his only dear Son, and will he not with him also freely give me all things?" Would an earthly father not refuse bread to his famished child, and will my Heavenly Father not give his Holy Spirit to me in the measure that I need his influences? To what purpose are all these promises which he has given me, if he will not work in me that measure of sanctification which is necessary to the complete enjoyment of them? But I find holiness amongst the most distinguished of his promises. He has said, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you:" &c. I will not fear then to engage in the work of "cleansing myself," since God has promised to perform it in me: for "if he work, who shall let it?" My weakness, so far from being an obstacle to him, shall rather be an occasion for him to glorify himself the more: and, "through him strengthening me, I can do all things".]

3. In a way of actual efficiency—

[The promises, as contained in the word, effect nothing: it is only as dwelling in the heart, and relied upon in the soul, that they produce any saving operation. Then they are of necessity accompanied by the Holy Spirit, who works in and by them; and who, on that very account, is called "The Holy

^p 1 John iii. 3.

^q Rom. xii. 1.

^r Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^s Phil. ii. 12, 13.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^u Phil. iv. 13.

Spirit of promise^x." When applied to the soul by him, they have, if I may so speak, a buoyancy, bearing up the soul to high and heavenly things. We know that we, by filling a capacious vessel with air of a lighter species, can cause it to rise by its own buoyancy, and to soar above the clouds: how much more then shall we, when "filled with the Spirit," and borne up upon the wings of promise, rise in our hearts and minds to the highest heavens! We are aware that this illustration is not to be pressed too far; but neither is it to be discarded altogether as fanciful, since our blessed Lord himself has said, that "his Holy Spirit in us shall be within us a well of water springing up unto everlasting life^y." Here the heavenly tendency of the principle within us is plainly asserted: and, whatever be the word which first begets us to the heavenly life, it is the word of promise which brings the soul to its full maturity of Christian perfection^z. It was the abundant indwelling of the promises in the Apostle's soul that filled him with "the love of Christ, and constrained him" to live unto his God and Saviour in a way that no other man ever did, and caused his "conversation to be continually in heaven^a." And in proportion as they are realized in our souls, will be the sanctifying effects produced by them.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are seeking holiness as their end, without using the promises as the means—

[This is common both in those who are altogether ignorant of the Gospel, and in those whose views of it are yet dim and clouded: in the one, it springs from self-righteous pride; in the others, from mistaken and misplaced humility: but in both it is a fatal evil.

As for the self-righteous formalist, he would reverse the Apostle's exhortation, and, instead of saying, "Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves," they would say, Having cleansed ourselves, let us expect a fulfilment of all the promises. But no man shall ever attain salvation in such a way as that. No man can ever attain such holiness as God requires, but by the promises: nor, if he could, would such attainments ever purchase him an interest in the promises. They must be received as freely as they are given: they are given to us as sinners, as "ungodly," as having no works whatever to bring to God^b: and, if we will not embrace them under this character, renouncing all dependence on our own

^x Eph. i. 13.

^y John iv. 14.

^z Jam. i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23. Eph. v. 26, 27.

^a 2 Cor. v. 14. Phil. iii. 20.

^b Rom. iv. 4—6.

righteousness, and seeking to be saved by grace alone, we shall never have so much as one of them fulfilled to us^c.

Nor is the legal Christian in reality building on any better foundation than the self-righteous formalist: for, though he does not profess to found his hopes on his own righteousness, yet he looks to his own attainments as his warrant for relying on the promises of his God. He thinks it would be presumptuous in him to rely on the promises, because he cannot find in himself that measure of holiness which he considers as necessary to qualify him for an interest in them. But this is the very same error which the self-righteous formalist runs into: and the same answer, in a measure, must be given to it: only, whilst to the formalist I say, You *must* rely upon the promises; to the legal character I say, You *may*. They are all given as freely as the air you breathe: and precisely as the converts on the day of Pentecost apprehended them, so may you apprehend them freely, without money and without price: and as the jailor was justified by his faith the very instant he believed, so shall you be.

Nor need we be afraid of this doctrine as having a licentious tendency; for what was the effect of it in the apostolic age? the same shall it be in this and every age; the promises of God will always, when duly received, operate to the production of holiness; and every one who embraces them aright, will proceed to cleanse himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.]

2. Those who rest in the promises without regarding the end to be produced by them—

[Such persons there are, and ever have been, in the Church of God; persons, who think it legal to exhort men to holiness, and who make no other use of the promises, than to cherish in themselves an assurance of their own acceptance with God. These persons would correct the Apostle as an ignorant and ill-instructed teacher. They would say, "Having these promises, let us be full of confidence and joy:" but they would never deign to say, "Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves:" *this*, forsooth, is *legal*. But whether *they* be right, or *the Apostle*, judge ye. Let such self-deceiving and conceited professors imagine as they will, God does not make so light of holiness: on the contrary, he tells us, that by our works we shall be judged in the last day, and by our works we are to be judged even now. Yes, by their fruits shall the followers of Christ be known: and if we slight them, we shall find all our pretended faith to be of no effect. "In vain shall we say, Lord, Lord, if we do not the things which he says."

^c Phil. iii. 9. Rom. iii. 24. Eph. ii. 8, 9.

I must entreat all then to shun this deadly heresy; and to search and try themselves, and see what effect the promises have produced upon them; for, as God is true, “without holiness shall no man see the Lord.”]

3. Those who are seeking the end by the appointed means—

[Shall you fail of success? Assuredly you shall not: for “the word of promise will bring forth fruit in you, as it doth in all the world.” Treasure up in your minds all “the exceeding great and precious promises,” which “in Christ Jesus are yea and Amen:” dwell upon them: plead them before God in prayer: declare to him your affiance in them: expect their accomplishment: limit not the Holy One of Israel in any thing: bear in mind that with him all things are possible. Verily, if you will thus believe, you shall see the glory of God. Sin shall be weakened in you: Satan shall flee before you: all the principalities and powers of hell shall be bruised under your feet: in a word, Christ shall be formed in you, and “you shall be changed into his image from glory to glory by the Spirit of your God.” Strengthened by these, your consolations shall be rich, your progress rapid, your victories secure: and in due time you shall possess the full substance of all the promises in the complete attainment of God’s perfect image, and the everlasting fruition of his glory.]

MMXXX.

THE GROUNDS OF A MINISTER’S REGARD FOR HIS PEOPLE.

2 Cor. vii. 3. *Ye are in our hearts to die and live with you.*

THERE is in every man a quick sensibility with respect to any thing that may affect his character: even a slight insinuation, that seems to convey reproof, is keenly felt. On this account we ought to be extremely cautious, not only when criminating others, but even when vindicating ourselves; because a necessary self-vindication may easily be construed as an oblique censure upon others. We cannot but admire the delicacy of the Apostle’s mind, when asserting the integrity of his conduct towards the Church at Corinth. There were some in that place who had traduced his character: for the sake of others therefore it was necessary that he should

declare his innocence with respect to the things that were laid to his charge. But fearing that, in doing this, he might appear to cast a reflection indiscriminately on the whole body, he adds, with exquisite tenderness and affection, that, so far from intending to condemn them all, he was willing, if his other duties would admit of it, to live and die among them.

In order to promote in all this amiable disposition, we shall consider,

I. The grounds of the Apostle's love—

St. Paul felt a love towards the whole human race: but he was filled with a peculiar affection towards the Corinthians on account of,

1. Their relation to God—

[The Apostle had reason to believe that the Corinthians, notwithstanding some great evils which obtained among them^a, were truly converted to God; and that the greater part of them were very eminent Christians^b.

This was a just ground for loving them. Indeed, if he had not been penetrated with an unfeigned regard for them, he would have had no evidence of his own love to God: for "he who loveth him that begat, must love those who are begotten of him^c."]]

2. Their relation to himself—

[Having been, in God's hand, the instrument of their conversion, he stood related to them as their spiritual father^d. Now, as a peculiar affection subsists between those who bear this relation according to the flesh, so it is reasonable that there should be a mutual regard between those also who are thus united in the bonds of the Spirit. Doubtless the Apostle did not confine his regards to these^e: but, having "travailed in birth with them," he felt all the anxieties and affections of a parent towards them.]]

The fervour of his love will appear from,

II. The way in which he manifested it—

We may notice in the context,

1. His affectionate remembrance of them—

^a 1 Cor. i. 11. and iii. 1—4. and v. 1, 2. and vi. 5—8. and viii. 9—12. and xi. 18—22. and xiv. 26.

^b 1 Cor. i. 5—7. and 2 Cor. viii. 7.

^c 1 John v. 1.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 15. and 2 Cor. xii. 14. with Acts xviii. 1—18.

^e Col. ii. 1.

[He boasted of them wherever he went: he held them up as peculiarly worthy of imitation^f: and so great was the satisfaction which he felt in hearing of their welfare, that it far over-balanced all the sufferings he endured. What clearer proof could he give of his affection for them?]

2. His faithful admonitions—

[Though he loved them, he was not blind to their faults. When he saw them deviating from the path of duty, he performed the office of a monitor and guide. He changed his voice towards them, as he saw occasion: sometimes he spake with the authority of an Apostle^g, and sometimes with the tenderness of a friend or parent^h. This was an eminent proof of his love, because it shewed that his concern for their souls swallowed up every other considerationⁱ.]

3. His devotion to their service—

[He regarded not wealth, or ease, or honour; but would have been contented “to live and die with them” who had but ill requited all his past kindness: yea, he declared, that “he would most gladly spend and be spent for them, though the more abundantly he loved them, the less he were loved^k.” Nothing short of laying down our life for any person could testify more love than this.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us improve our intercourse with each other in life—

[It is the happiness of a minister and his people to have frequent and familiar intercourse with each other. We have through the mercy of our God enjoyed it; but alas! how little have we improved it! Let us look unto our God for his blessing upon us in future^l: for without that “neither Paul can plant, nor Apollos water, to any good purpose^m.”]

2. Let us prepare for our separation in death—

[As “the priests under the law could not continue by reason of death,” so neither can we under the Gospel. We must go to give an account of our stewardship; and you to answer for the advantages you have enjoyed. Let us be looking forward to that solemn meeting which we shall have at the bar of judgment. Let us implore help from God, that we may discharge our duties towards each other aright; and meet again, not as witnesses against each other, but as fellow-

^f 2 Cor. vii. 14. and 2 Cor. viii. 24. and ix. 1, 2.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 18, 19.

^h 2 Cor. ii. 1—5. and 1 Cor. iv. 14.

ⁱ Lev. xix. 17. with ver. 12.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 15.

^l 2 Cor. vi. 11—13.

^m 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.

heirs of his glory. And the Lord grant that we may then be your joy, and that you may be "our joy and crown of rejoicing" to all eternityⁿ!]

ⁿ 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. and 2 Cor. i. 14.

MMXXXI.

REPENTANCE EXEMPLIFIED IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH.

2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. *Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

IT is sometimes urged against faithful ministers, that they distress the minds of their auditors by their preaching: and it must be confessed that the accusation is true. But it must not be concluded from thence, that they take a pleasure in grieving any, or that they are too harsh in their ministrations: they must declare the mind of God respecting sin and sinners, in order to bring men to repentance: and if they find any persons truly humbled for their sins, they account it the richest reward of their labours.

St. Paul had reproved the Corinthian Church for taking part with the incestuous man, instead of casting him out from their society^a: and his epistle had been the means of producing in them a godly sorrow, together with a suitable demeanour. When he found this to be the case, he wrote again to them, and told them, that it had pained him exceedingly to grieve any of them; but that he rejoiced in seeing their grief operate in so beneficial a manner; this godly sorrow had answered the very end of his admonitions; and he was now ready to pour the oil of joy into the wounds which he had inflicted^b.

^a 1 Cor. v. 1—5, 13.

^b ver. 8, 9.

We shall take occasion, from the words before us, to trace repentance,

I. In its nature—

[Repentance, as a grace, proceeds from God, the giver of every good gift^c, and from Christ, who is exalted to bestow it^d; and who alone can produce in the heart that “godly sorrow which worketh it.”

To ascertain what godly sorrow is, we must compare it with “the sorrow of the world,” with which all of us are in some measure acquainted. The sorrow of the world may either relate to *that sorrow which arises from worldly troubles*, or *that sorrow which a worldly man may have in reference to his sins*. In either view it is a sorrow which “worketh death.”

The troubles of this life often depress men, so as to indispose them for their proper business, and rob them of all their comfort, and destroy their constitution, and ultimately to bring them to the grave^e.

Many also are greatly distressed in reference to their sins: they are filled with dreadful apprehensions of God’s wrath; they are harassed with unbelieving fears; they are even brought into the depths of despair, conceiving, that there is no mercy for them—that they are not of the number of God’s elect—that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost—and that it would be either hypocrisy or presumption in them even to offer up a prayer to God. Now this sorrow, like that before-mentioned, worketh only death. It keeps us from God, instead of bringing us to him^f; it leads us to cloke and extenuate, rather than to confess and aggravate, our sins; it stimulates only to self-righteous purposes and endeavours, which are invariably frustrated by the power of indwelling corruption; and sometimes it terminates even in suicide itself^g. At all events it causes hard thoughts of God, and utterly unfits the soul for real humiliation and contrition; so that, whether it be more or less afflictive at present, it equally furthers our eternal condemnation.

In direct opposition to this is that godly sorrow which produces genuine repentance. The fore-mentioned sorrow consists of *unbelief*, *despondency*, and *fear* of punishment; but the most essential ingredients of godly sorrow are *faith*, *hope*, and *love*. The person sorrowing goes to God, *believing* him to be a rewarder of them that diligently seek him——He goes to God through Christ, *hoping* that for Christ’s sake his sins

^c Jam. i. 17.

^d Acts v. 31.

^e It is not uncommon to say of such persons, they died of a broken heart.

^f Jer. ii. 25.

^g Judas.

shall be forgiven him — — — He goes to God *with love* in his heart, determining to justify God in whatever he shall do, yea, even in his own eternal condemnation — — —

Now this sorrow worketh repentance to salvation: it disposes a man to search out all his sins, and to humble himself for them in dust and ashes: it urges him to plead with earnestness the promises which God has made to returning penitents, and humbly to rely upon them: it causes him to seek after a conformity to God's image; and determines him to glorify his Saviour with all the powers that he has. Such a repentance as this no man ever yet repented of; nor would he ever repent of it, however distressing the means had been by which it had been wrought in him. Every sorrow, short of this, would only issue in everlasting sorrow: but this sorrow invariably works repentance to life.]

Thus we have traced repentance to its source, and seen it in its cause. Let us proceed to trace it,

II. In its effects—

[The Apostle enumerates a great variety of effects produced in the minds of the Christians at Corinth: and his words have certainly a primary reference to that particular people on that particular occasion: but they admirably express also the emotions which are universally produced by true repentance, in whomsoever it obtains. We may therefore be permitted to consider them in that view, or, at least, to accommodate them to that subject.

For the sake of an easy distribution of the subject we shall transpose the first word, and consider it last: we shall then see the effects of genuine repentance in reference to our *past*, *present*, and *future* conduct.

The Corinthians, humbled by St. Paul's reproofs, were studious to "clear themselves" to the world, to the Church, to their monitor, and to God himself; and to shew that they sincerely repented of what they had done amiss. They felt an "indignation" against the sin they had committed, and against themselves for having committed it; nor could they forgive themselves, till they knew that God had forgiven them. Thus will every true penitent endeavour to "clear himself," and render it conspicuous both to God and man, that he is indeed a new creature — — — He is "indignant," nor can he endure himself, when he reflects on his past life: when he calls to mind his rebellion against God, and his contempt of Christ's redeeming love, he is covered with shame and confusion of face — — —

The Corinthians, penetrated with a sense of their misconduct, felt a holy "fear," lest they should ever relapse into the

sin of which they were repenting, or be drawn aside again to any similar enormity. They “vehemently desired” pardon of God for their past transgression, and grace, that they might be enabled to act with more consistency in future. They were animated in this with a “zeal” which nothing could damp, and with a “revenge” which determined them neither to spare the public offender, nor the evil dispositions of their own hearts. And do we not see in them the character of every true penitent? In all who truly repent, there will be an humble “fear” of falling again under the power of those lusts which formerly led them captive — — — a “vehement desire” to serve, to enjoy, to glorify their God — — — a “zeal,” which enables them to set their faces as a flint against the whole world — — — and a “revenge” that determines them to sacrifice their bosom lusts, though dear as a right eye, or useful as a right hand — — —

The Apostle further notices the “carefulness” with which the Corinthians exerted themselves to avoid every thing in future which might turn them aside from the path of duty. What word can more fitly characterize the disposition of a penitent in reference to his future conduct? Once he could walk at large, without taking any heed to his ways; but now he inquires whether the action be pleasing to God or not: he watches over the motives and principles by which he is actuated: he considers what may be the consequences of his actions both to himself and others: he is solicitous to avoid not only what is in itself evil, but whatever may be the means and occasion of evil. Hence he will not readily expose himself to temptation: he keeps at a distance from those amusements, and those companions that have formerly ensnared him: and he begs of God to guide his every step, and to “preserve him blameless unto his heavenly kingdom.”]

WE CONCLUDE with inquiring whether the commendation bestowed on the Corinthians in the text, can with propriety be applied to us?

[“*Have we in all things approved ourselves to be clear in this matter?*” We ask not, whether we have had any repentance at all or not, (though perhaps there are many amongst us that have had no concern for their past sins, and that feel no anxiety about their eternal salvation): but we ask, whether we have had any other sorrow for sin, than such as will spring from worldly principles, and consist with a worldly mind?

Let us inquire whether our sorrow be of an unbelieving, desponding, *nature*, that is little else than slavish fear; or whether it be of an ingenuous kind, that leads us to rely on Christ in the exercise of an humble hope, and fervent love? — — —

Let us examine thoroughly the *effects* of our sorrow, and see whether they accord with those which were produced in the Church at Corinth? Can we appeal to God, that we have "approved ourselves to be clear in this matter," so that there is no room to doubt whether our repentance be genuine or not? If God were now to call us to his judgment-seat, could we appeal to him, as the searcher of our hearts, that it has been, and yet is, our daily endeavour to exercise such repentance as this?

Let it be remembered, that all other repentance must, and will, be repented of: all other repentance will leave us short of salvation: all other repentance will deceive us to our ruin. Our blessed Lord has told us, that, "except we repent, we must all perish:" and we have now seen the nature of repentance, not in a mere superficial manner, but as it may be distinguished from every thing that is apt to be mistaken for it. Behold then, life and death are before us; let us beg of God to undeceive us all, and to give unto us that repentance which shall never be repented of.]

MMXXXII.

LIBERALITY TO THE POOR.

2 Cor. viii. 1—5. *Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the Churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.*

THE texture of the human mind is extremely delicate: and every one, who would produce any beneficial effect upon others, must approach them with tenderness and care. We may, by an unseasonable urgency, cause a person to revolt from a measure, to which by a more gentle address he might have easily been persuaded. The mind of man naturally affects liberty; and will be more powerfully moved, when its decisions appear to be the consequence of volition, than when they are called forth by the compulsory influence of persuasion. This the Apostle

Paul well understood, and bore, as it were, in constant remembrance. Not that he on any occasion acted with artifice: no; his caution was the result of his own exquisite delicacy and holy refinement: and his success in affecting the minds of others bore ample testimony to the wisdom of his measures. He was anxious to obtain from amongst the Gentile Churches relief for the distressed and persecuted saints at Jerusalem. In writing therefore to the Church at Corinth who were more opulent, he endeavoured to interest them in behalf of their suffering brethren in Judæa. But he did not proceed, as we might have expected, to expatiate upon the wants of the sufferers, or on the obligations of the Church at Corinth to relieve them; but simply communicated, as an article of pleasing intelligence, the liberality that had been displayed towards them by the poorer Churches of Macedonia; and then stirred them up to imitate so laudable an example.

With the same view we shall now,

I. Consider the example here set before us—

The Churches here referred to were those of Thessalonica, Beræa, and Philippi: and truly their example was most eminent in respect of,

1. Their liberality—

[The real extent of liberality must not be judged of by the sum given, so much as by the circumstances under which it is given: our blessed Lord has told us, that the widow's mite exceeded in value all that the most opulent had bestowed, because their donations were a small portion only of what they possessed, whereas her's was her all, even all her living. To view the liberality of the Macedonians aright, we must particularly notice the *time* and *manner* of its exercise.

It was in a *time* of "*great affliction* and of *deep poverty*." Now persons in great affliction are for the most part so occupied with their own troubles, as to have but little either of leisure or inclination to enter into the concerns of others — — — And, if they be at the same time in a state of deep poverty, they seem by their very situation, as it were, to be exempt from any obligation to relieve the wants of others: if they shed a tear of sympathy, it is as much as, under their circumstances, can be expected of them — — — But behold,

it was in this very state, and under these circumstances, that the Macedonian Churches exerted themselves for the relief of persons belonging to a different and distant country, of persons too, who, though agreeing with them in the profession of Christianity, differed widely from them in many points of subordinate importance.

The *manner* too in which their liberality was exercised deserves particularly to be noticed. It was put forth *voluntarily*: they waited not for any application to this effect from the Apostle; they were willing of their own mind to embrace the opportunity afforded them of fulfilling a duty so congenial with the best feelings of their hearts. It was exercised also *bountifully*. Their ability was the only measure of their gifts. In some respect they seemed, as it were, to exceed even that: for "to their power, and beyond their power," they exerted themselves, insomuch that, according to God's estimate of their gifts, they "abounded unto the riches of liberality." And what they did, they did *zealously*. They did not make an offer which they hoped would be refused, and then, on the refusal, feel pleased that the will had been accepted for the deed: no; they forced the Apostle to accept their donations: they would not suffer him to decline their offer; "they prayed him with much entreaty that he would be their almoner, and be the medium of conveying to their afflicted brethren the relief which God had enabled them to bestow.

If we would know whence it was that they were enabled so to act, the text informs us: it was, primarily, from "the grace of God" operating powerfully on their hearts; and, next, from the joyful frame of their minds, which bore them up above all their own trials, and exulted in every opportunity of manifesting their love to their blessed Lord and Saviour. They had "an abundance of joy" in the midst of their deep poverty; and that "joy in the Lord was their strength."]

2. Their piety—

[This was not a whit less remarkable: indeed, it was the foundation, of which their liberality was the superstructure. They "first gave up themselves to God" in a way both of *secret surrender*, and of *open profession*.

They surrendered themselves wholly to Christ as his willing subjects and servants. Without this, all their liberality would have been a mere heathen virtue. If, without love to man, a person might "give all his goods to feed the poor, and yet be no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal," much more would his best actions be of no value, if not springing from love to God. It is this principle that constitutes the perfection of every thing we do, and makes a wish, a sigh, a groan more acceptable to God than the most splendid action

without it. Every thing emanating from it has “an odour of a sweet smell, and is a sacrifice truly acceptable and well-pleasing to God.”

At the same time they openly and boldly confessed Christ before men: “They gave themselves to the Apostle and to the Church, by the will of God.” They were not timid Christians, fearful of augmenting their afflictions by an open profession of the Gospel: they were willing to bear any cross which their adherence to Christ might bring upon them. They had already been brought into “a great trial of affliction, and to deep poverty,” for his sake: but none of these things moved them, nor did they “count even life itself dear to them,” if only they might but honour their Divine Master, and finish their course with joy. This put an additional value on their services, as manifesting the very spirit that was in Christ, “who willingly impoverished himself to enrich a ruined world^a.”]

Having so excellent an example before us, we will now,

II. Propose it to your imitation—

First, we would call you to imitate their piety—

[This, though last mentioned in the text, was first in point of time, and was, in fact, the source and fountain of all the graces which they exercised.

We call upon you then to “*give yourselves up wholly to the Lord.*” This is the indispensable duty of every child of man. As creatures, we are bound to serve and glorify our God, from whom we have received all that we are and have; but, as redeemed sinners, our obligation to serve him is infinitely enhanced. The Apostle tells the Corinthians in his former epistle, “Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price:” so say I to every one amongst you, “Ye are not your own.” Nothing, that you either are or have, is your own: the members of your bodies, the faculties of your souls, your time, your property, your influence, all belong to him, “whose you are, and whom you are bound to serve:” all are to be improved for his glory; as St. Paul has said, “Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify him with your body and your spirit, which are his.” And this is as reasonable as it is necessary; agreeably to what he has elsewhere said, “Yield yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

But with this secret surrender of yourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ there must also be *an open avowal of your adherence*

^a ver. 9.

to him. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." "If we will be Christ's disciples indeed, we must take up our cross daily and follow him:" we must follow him "without the camp, bearing his reproach:" and so far must we be from dreading his cross, that we must "glory in it," and "rejoice that we are counted worthy to bear it," and "esteem as Moses did, the reproach of Christ as greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt." We must never be ashamed of Christ; for, if we be, he will be ashamed of us "in the presence of his Father, and of the holy angels." "If we confess him, he will confess us; but, if we deny him, he will deny us." When the Apostle says, "they gave themselves unto us by the will of God," it must not be understood as if he gloried in gaining proselytes to *himself*: it is of their union with *the Church*, as avowed friends and followers of Christ, that he speaks; and *this* all must be, if they would approve themselves faithful to their Lord and Master: *this* is the will of God respecting every child of man; that we "come out from the world, and be separate" from it, and be "as lights shining in a dark place," "holding forth in the whole of our spirit and conversation the word of life."

Let me then urge upon you all this duty. The Churches of Macedonia acted thus in defiance of all the malice of men or devils: though brought by means of it into "a great trial of affliction and deep poverty," they turned not back, but strove the more to glorify their God in proportion as their enemies sought to suppress their zeal. So then do ye also: harbour not for a moment that "fear of man which bringeth a snare;" "fear not man, who can only destroy the body; but fear him, and him only, who, when he has destroyed the body, can destroy both body and soul in hell."]

Next, we would invite you to imitate also their liberality—

[*Your obligations* to it are as great as theirs: for you, as well as they, "have been redeemed by the precious blood of that spotless Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ" — — — *The occasion* too, if not altogether similar, is quite as urgent: for if we plead not now in behalf of persons reduced to the deepest distress by persecution, we plead for those whose circumstances are most indigent, and whose temporal benefit is consulted with an ulterior view to the welfare of their souls^b — — — May I not add too that *the means afforded you* are similar?

^b This was delivered in aid of a *Visiting Society*, where the souls of the persons visited are the chief object. But the subject may be adapted to any charity, by stating its peculiar purposes.

You cannot personally perform all the offices that are executed by those who have undertaken to dispense your charity^c — — — Nor will it be necessary for you to “pray others with much entreaty” to be your agents; since a number of suitable persons have voluntarily devoted themselves to this good work.

Let me then call upon you all to “manifest” by your liberality “the sincerity of your love to Christ.” I will not except any from this labour of love. Are any of you “in a great trial of affliction,” and at the same time “in deep poverty?” I would not on that account dispense with your exertions; nor would you wish me so to do, if you have received the grace of God in truth. I will not indeed be importunate with you, as with others: but I will remind you of what was done by the Christians of former days in circumstances more afflictive than your own; and I will add, that their conduct is set forth by the Apostle as worthy to be followed by Christians in every age: I say, I will not *urge* you to liberality on this occasion; but I well know what you *will* do, if “God has bestowed his grace upon you:” I know, that “to your power, and even beyond your power, you will be willing of yourselves.” But to those who are in circumstances of ease and affluence I would say, Look at the example set before you; and think what exertions *your* circumstances require. O, give not in a grudging or sparing manner; but let it be seen by your donations what you understand by “abounding unto the riches of liberality:” and, as God in his providence has enabled you to stretch forth Corinthian hands, shew that he has also in his mercy given you Macedonian hearts — — —]

^c Here again, the statement must be varied according to circumstances: if the charity be a hospital, or school, or any other, a suitable statement will be necessary.

MMXXXIII.

LIBERALITY TO THE POOR RECOMMENDED.

2 Cor. viii. 7, 8. *As ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.*

THOUGH there is no such thing as absolute perfection in this life, the Christian, if his life really correspond with his profession, is in some sense a

perfect character. In this respect, the new creation of the soul resembles the first creation of the body. A child, the very instant it comes into the world, is perfect in all its members: advancing years will strengthen him, indeed, in every one of them, but will add to him no new faculty, or sense, or power. So the child of God, when once he is truly regenerate, possesses in himself the whole circle of Christian graces, though at first in a state of infantine weakness only: but the more he cultivates them, the more will they all improve. The particular grace which is here mentioned requires more than ordinary attention, because of its transcendent excellency, and because of the frequent occasion which arises to the whole Christian world for the exercise of it. The Apostle acknowledged, that in other graces the Corinthians greatly excelled; and therefore he took encouragement to recommend to them a similar pre-eminence in this grace also.

To bring this subject before you to advantage, I must mark,

I. The commendation given—

The approbation here manifested was doubtless exceeding strong—

[Many are afraid to express approbation of what is good, lest the person commended should make it an occasion of pride. But this was not the mind of the Apostle Paul. He would not indeed pay a compliment to any man at the expense of truth: he even appeals to man, and calls God himself also to witness, that “he had not at any time used flattering words^a” but yet he saw no reason for withholding from men a testimony of his approbation, when the expressing of his sentiments would encourage them to increased exertions in the cause of God. To the Christians at Rome he expresses himself thus: “I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another^b.” To the Corinthian Church he speaks in yet stronger terms: “I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was

^a 1 Thess. ii. 5.

^b Rom. xv. 14.

confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ^c." So again, after the high eulogium which he had given them in my text, he tells them, in the very next chapter, that all who had heard of their liberality "both prayed for them and longed after them for the exceeding grace of God in them^d."

And good reason there was for this commendation: for their "faith" was genuine; their "utterance" easy and intelligible to all whom they addressed: their "knowledge" was diversified; so that they delivered their sentiments to great advantage: and so devoted were they to the service of God in their respective spheres, that nothing could exceed their "diligence:" and in addition to all this, instead of setting up themselves or others against him, as had formerly been the case with many amongst them, they abounded also in "love to him," as their common parent^e. Truly this was a state highly creditable to them, and most honourable to Christianity itself.]

And may I not adopt, in some measure at least, the language of my text towards you?

[God knoweth, my brethren, that I would not knowingly "use flattering words towards you:" but I must and will say, in reference to many of you, that your "faith" is remarkably simple, unmixed with erroneous notions of any kind. You do also, in your respective spheres, communicate instruction to others with a ready "utterance," and with a "knowledge" that is at once enlightened and discreet. You discharge also, with "diligence, all" your offices in common life. And I should be ungrateful in the extreme, if I did not acknowledge also your "love to your minister," and your readiness to promote any measures for the good of others which he proposes for your adoption and support^f. And, from this view of your character, I am emboldened to exhort you to bear with me, whilst I call your attention to,]

II. The advice administered—

"See that ye abound in this grace also," the grace of liberality to the poor. The words added in our translation here are too strong. The Apostle tells us, that "he did not speak by way of commandment, but only in a way of advice^g." He tells us, also, on what grounds he offered this advice; namely,

^c 1 Cor. i. 4—7.

^d 2 Cor. ix. 14.

^e 2 Cor. viii. 7.

^f Of course, no minister will use such an Address as this, but to a *very peculiar* audience, and on a *very peculiar* occasion.

^g γνώμην δίδωμι.

1. Because he wished them not to be outdone by others—

[He had said of the Macedonians, that “they, out of their deep poverty, had abounded unto the riches of liberality^h.” Now, shall the *rich* Corinthians be exceeded by the *poor* and afflicted Macedonians? God forbid. It would be a disgrace to them to be found wanting in a duty which they were so much better able to fulfil: and therefore, “from the forwardness of others, he takes occasion” to excite in them a holy ambition to excel. Some would be ready to think that such a motive was low, and carnal, and unworthy of a Christian mind. I grant there is an *unholy* ambition; but there is also a *holy* emulation, to which men may with propriety be called; such as that which St. Paul endeavoured to excite in his Jewish brethren, when he addressed the Gospel to the Gentiles, and “magnified his office as a minister of the Gentiles, if by any means he might provoke to emulation them who were his flesh, and might save some of themⁱ.”

And on this ground I would now address myself to you^k — — —]

2. Because he would have them “place beyond a doubt the sincerity of their love”—

[Love must be operative, if it be sincere; yea, and must operate too in this way: for “if we see a brother have need, and shut up our bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in us^l?” or, “if we see a brother or sister have need, and bid him be warmed and filled, whilst we administer nothing for his relief, what are our professions of love to man, but downright hypocrisy^m?” If we have truly Christian love, it will resemble “the love of Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be richⁿ.” Then I call you, brethren, to this proof of your love. Let it be seen that “you love not in word, and in tongue; but in deed, and in truth^o.” The occasion for your liberality is great and urgent^p — — — and I trust, that “as ye abound in” every other grace, so ye will not merely exercise, but every one of you according to your ability “abound in,” this grace also.]

^h ver. 1, 2.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 13, 14.

^k There are occasions, such as great and public calamities, which have called forth the benevolence of the public, when such an Address is peculiarly called for. This was addressed to a *Society for Visiting and Instructing the Poor*. The examples should be stated.

^l 1 John iii. 17.

^m Jam. ii. 15—17.

ⁿ ver. 9.

^o 1 John iii. 18.

^p It should here be stated at large.

Brethren, let me, in conclusion, ENTREAT you,

1. To merit this commendation—

[Verily, if the Christian world at large were addressed in such terms as these, it would be as keen a satire as the most malignant infidel could utter — — — But I must say, that if you answer not, in some measure at least, to this character, you have no just title to the Christian name: you resemble those rather in the Church of Philadelphia, “who said that they were Jews, but did lie^a,” “He who is a Jew in deed, must be a Jew *inwardly*; and have the circumcision, not of the flesh only, but of the Spirit also; the praise of which is not of men, but of God^r.”]

2. To fulfil this duty—

[Need I say, that charity brings with it its own reward? You may conceive that the indigent and distressed are greatly comforted by the seasonable relief that is administered to them: but this I tell you with confidence, that they who on Christian principles administer to their relief, are the happier of the two: for we have authority to declare, and it was a favourite saying of our Lord, that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”]

^a Rev. iii. 9.

^r Rom. ii. 28, 29.

MMXXXIV.

THE GRACE OF CHRIST.

2 Cor. viii. 9. *Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

THE excellence of Christianity with respect to the mysteries it reveals, and the precepts it inculcates, is generally acknowledged; but few see it with respect to the motives by which it enforces the performance of our duty. But in this last respect it differs as widely from all other religions as in either of the former; and claims an undoubted superiority over all the dogmas of philosophy, and over Judaism itself. The love of Christ in dying for us is not merely proposed as a tenet to be believed, but is urged as the most powerful, and indeed the only effectual, argument for the quickening of us to an universal and

unreserved obedience. This was the consideration by which St. Paul enforced his exhortations to liberality when writing to the Corinthian Church: and it will be universally operative, wherever it is understood and felt.

In discoursing on this subject we shall not enter in a general way into our fall, and our recovery by Christ, but will,

I. Set forth *the grace of Christ* as it is here delineated—

There are four distinct considerations in the text, every one of them reflecting light upon this point, as so many mirrors uniting their rays in one common focus. These we shall view in their order:

1. The pre-existent state of Christ—

[In the text we are told, “He was rich.” This idea when applied to our fellow-creatures we can easily understand: but who can comprehend it when applied to Christ? What adequate conception can we form of his *glory* or *felicity*? He was from all eternity “in the bosom of his Father^a,” and was “daily his delight^b.” He had a communion with the Father in all that he knew^c, in all that he did^d, in all that he enjoyed^e. He had a most perfect Oneness with the Father^f, possessing in himself all the fulness of the Godhead^g, and receiving together with him the adoration of all the angels in heaven^h. Such was the glory which Christ had with the Father before the world was brought into existenceⁱ. Nor was he capable of receiving any addition either of honour or of happiness from his creatures^k. He would have been equally great and glorious though no creature had existed either in earth or in heaven to behold him^l; or though all who transgressed against him should perish for ever. Yet such was his love, that in the midst of all his blessedness he thought of us, and undertook our cause, and engaged to become our substitute and surety^m.

How infinitely does this “grace” transcend our highest conceptions! Indeed we do but “darken counsel by words without knowledge,” when we attempt to speak on this mysterious subject.]

^a John i. 18.

^b Prov. viii. 30.

^c Matt. xi. 27.

^d John v. 19.

^e John xvii. 10.

^f John x. 30.

^g Col. ii. 9.

^h Isai. vi. 3. with John xii. 41.

ⁱ John xvii. 5.

^k Ps. xvi. 2.

^l Job xxii. 2.

^m Ps. xl. 7, 8.

2. The humiliation to which he submitted—

[It was a marvellous act of grace that he should condescend to form creatures, and to give them a sight of his blessedness and glory. But that he should notice them after they had left their first estate, and despoiled themselves of their original righteousness, this was an act of condescension which we should have deemed impossible, if he had not actually evinced by his conduct that it could be done. But who would believe it possible that he should stoop so low as to take our nature upon him? Yet even that he did; and *that* too not in its primitive state, but in its present fallen state, subject to numberless infirmities and to death itself. He was “made in the likeness of *sinful* flesh,” and was in all things like unto us, sin only excepted^o. Nor did he assume even our fallen nature in its highest condition: he was born, not in a palace, but a stable; he spent his life, during the first thirty years, in the low occupation of a carpenter; and, for the four last years, he was often destitute of the common necessities of life, yea, even of a place where to lay his head^p. He was aware that he should meet with nothing but contempt and persecution from men; and yet he submitted to it for their sakes. But even this, great as it was, by no means reaches to the full extent of his debasement: No; he put himself in the place of sinners, that he might endure the curse due to their iniquities^q: he submitted to bear the assaults of Satan, and the wrath of God^r. If therefore we would form a just idea of his humiliation, we must visit the garden of Gethsemane, and see him bathed in a bloody sweat, and hear him “making supplication to his Father with strong crying and tears,” for the removal of the bitter cup^s: we must then follow him to Calvary, and hear his bitter complaints under the depths of dereliction^t, and behold him in the midst of inexpressible agonies of soul and body, dying the accursed death of the cross: and lastly, we must view him imprisoned in the grave under the sentence of the law, of that law which doomed us all to everlasting death^u. Here, here was humiliation, such as filled all heaven with wonder; here was poverty, such as never can be comprehended by men and angels.

In this view the Apostle elsewhere describes the grace of Christ, contrasting the dignity of his pre-existing state with the state he assumed, and the degradation he endured^x. O that we might have worthy conceptions of it, and be enabled

ⁿ Rom. viii. 3.^o Heb. ii. 17. and iv. 15.^p Matt. viii. 20.^q 1 Pet. ii. 24.^r Isai. liii. 10.^s Luke xxii. 41. Heb. v. 7.^t Matt. xxvii. 46.^u Gal. iii. 13.^x Phil. ii. 6—8.

in some poor measure to comprehend its unexplored heights, its unfathomable depths^y!]

3. The objects for whom he interposed—

[It was not for angels, the highest order of created beings, that Jesus interested himself, but for man: he passed by *them*, and deigned to notice *us*^z. But was there any thing in us more than in them, to recommend us to his regard? No: we were destitute of any the smallest good; and full of all imaginable evil^a. There was not a faculty of our souls that was not debased by sin, nor a member of our bodies that was not polluted with iniquity^b. We were even haters of God himself^c; and so full of enmity against him, that we were actually incapable of obeying any of his laws^d, and as far as our influence or example could prevail, we strove to banish him from the world^e.

Our misery too was as great as our wickedness. We were under sentence of condemnation, and exposed to all the curses of the broken law: “the wrath of God abode upon us;” and nothing remained but that the thread of life should be cut, and we should have been miserable in hell for evermore. Yet such was his compassion that he interposed for us, and became our mediator with God, our “advocate with the Father.” How wonderfully does this enhance the grace he has manifested! It would be a marvellous effort of love, if a king should put himself in the place of a condemned rebel, and suffer the sentence of the law in his stead: but for the Creator himself to become a creature, that he might suffer in the place of those who deserved nothing but death and hell, well may this be termed “the exceeding riches of his grace,” the very masterpiece of Divine love^f!]

4. The state to which, by that interposition, he exalts us—

[If he had procured a remission of our sentence, and the favour of annihilation, what a mercy would it have been! and what a mercy would the devils account it, if they could obtain such a favour at his hands! But this would not satisfy our adorable Saviour: he had far higher views in undertaking for us: he determined to restore us to a state of reconciliation with God; to renew our nature, and thereby fit us for the

^y Eph. iii. 18, 19. ^z Heb. ii. 16.

^a Jer. xvii. 9. Gen. vi. 5.

^b Rom. iii. 10—18.

^c Rom. i. 30.

^d Rom. viii. 7.

^e Rom. i. 28. Eph. ii. 12. and Ps. xiv. 1. “No God,” that is,

I wish there were none.

^f Eph. ii. 7. Rom. v. 8.

enjoyment of God. Moreover, to all the blessings of grace and peace he determined finally to add that of everlasting glory. He determined, not merely to remove our poverty, but to make us "rich." And in order to see how rich he makes his people, contrast for one moment the state of Dives in hell, crying in vain for one drop of water, and Lazarus enjoying all the fulness of God in Abraham's bosom. Such are the riches he designs for us: to procure them for us was the very end of his incarnation and death: nor will he ever relinquish those whom he has purchased with his blood, till he makes them "joint-heirs with himself," and puts them into possession of that "inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading." In a word, he became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh^g, that we might be one spirit with him^h. He emptied himself of his gloryⁱ, and descended, as it were, to the lowest hell, that he might "pluck us as brands out of the burning," and exalt us to the throne from whence he came^k.

Such, such was the grace of Christ: it was infinitely more than words can express, or than imagination can conceive.]

Having endeavoured to unfold this mystery, we will,

II. Inquire what you "know" respecting it—

It is here taken for granted that all Christians "*know*" this grace. Let me ask then, What you do know of it,

1. As an article of faith—

[Multitudes who are called Christians, know scarcely any thing respecting the faith which they profess; and, if interrogated concerning the ground of their hopes of salvation, would be found to expect it, not as purchased for them, by the death of Christ, but as obtained and merited by their own repentance and good works.

Many indeed are decidedly opposed to the principles of the Gospel, denying strenuously the divinity of Christ, and the atonement made by him, and the doctrine of justification by faith in him. As for such persons, they, with all their pretended knowledge, are as ignorant of the Gospel as if they had never heard it at all: and, if they were to attempt to expound my text, would reduce it to the veriest absurdity; divesting the work of Christ of all its grace and of all its efficacy.

But ye, I hope, brethren, "have not so learned Christ." Ye, I trust, do indeed believe in him as "Emmanuel, God with us." Ye believe that all the glory of the Godhead was his;

^g Eph. v. 30.

ⁱ ἐκένωσε, Phil. ii. 7.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^k Rev. iii. 21.

and that laying aside, as it were, for a season that glory, he become a man, and lived and died for you; that by his atoning blood he might reconcile you to God, and by his all-perfect righteousness he might obtain for you a title to an heavenly inheritance. You believe that if ever you possess the felicity of heaven, it must be altogether through the poverty which he submitted to for you: and all your hopes of heaven you found on him alone.

Hold fast then this faith. Yet let it not be in you as a mere speculative truth, but seek to improve it,]

2. As an influential principle—

[It is in this view that it is particularly brought forward in my text. And in this view chiefly was it endeared to the Apostle Paul, who bears this testimony respecting it; “The love of Christ constraineth me.” He rightly judged, that, “if one died, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live, should not live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again¹.” Now then has it that same influence on you? Does it fill you with wonder and admiration, that the God of heaven and earth should stoop so low for *you*, and submit to such indignities for *you*, and endure such sufferings for *you*, and by such mysterious methods obtain eternal glory for *you*? My dear brethren, if you know this mystery aright, it will so operate upon you, as to make you feel, that all you are, and all that you have, is Christ’s, to be employed solely and exclusively for him, whose you are, and whom you are bound to serve^m. “You will live not to yourselves, but altogether for him who is by every possible claim the rightful Lord both of the dead and living”.

The consideration of this love too will lead you to walk in his steps, and to shew to others, as far as you are able, the love which he has shewn to you^o — — — True indeed, you are not in existing circumstances required to *impoverish yourselves to enrich others*: but to make “your abundance the means of supplying the necessities of your poorer brethren” you are called^p; yea, and you are *bound* so to improve your talents, in order “to shew the sincerity of your love to Christ^q” — — —]

APPLICATION—

1. Seek then this knowledge—

[You well know with what labour and industry worldly knowledge is obtained: and will you grudge the labour that is

¹ 2 Cor. v. 14. ^m 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. ⁿ Rom. xiv. 7—9.

^o If this be a subject for a *Charity Sermon*, this idea must be greatly amplified.

^p ver. 13, 14.

^q ver. 8.

necessary for the attainment of divine knowledge? What are all earthly sciences in comparison of “the grace of Christ?” St. Paul, the most learned man of his day, “accounted all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord^r.” And you also, if you estimate things aright, will never rest, till you have acquired some insight into the great mystery of redemption through the sufferings of your incarnate God — — — As to the poor and illiterate, the knowledge of philosophy is far beyond their reach: but not so the knowledge of divine mysteries. “What God has hid from the wise and prudent, he does and will reveal to babes^s.” “The weak and foolish he has chosen in preference, in order that he may confound the wise and mighty, and constrain all to glory in him alone^t.” Only ask of God to enlighten your minds by the influence of his good Spirit, and “he will give to every one of you liberally, and without upbraiding^u” — — —]

2. Endeavour to improve it for the good of others—

[This is the knowledge which saves the soul^x. In “this is eternal life,” which is the inalienable property of all who possess it^y. Will you then “hide this light under a bushel, instead of making use of it for the benefit of all around you^z?” That be far from you. No, my brethren, seek to “grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ” yourselves, and diffuse it, if possible, to the very ends of the earth — — —]

^r Phil. iii. 8.

^s Matt. xi. 25.

^t 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

^u Jam. i. 5.

^x 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^y John xvii. 3.

^z Matt. v. 15.

MMXXXV.

LIBERALITY ENCOURAGED.

2 Cor. viii. 13—15. *I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: as it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.*

YOU have heard the king's letter read to you^a: and if St. Paul thanks God for “putting into the heart

^a This was for the Relief of the Distressed Manufacturers, Jan. 1827. And this exordium is inserted, in order to shew what, *on such an occasion*, may justly be admitted. But to such occasions it should be confined. Of course, for any other Charity, the exordium should be changed.

of Titus an earnest desire" to improve his influence at Corinth for the relief of the distressed Christians at Jerusalem^b, well may we acknowledge with thankfulness the goodness of God, who has "put it into the heart of our king" to exert his influence with us in behalf of our distressed brethren in the north: and I do trust, that a measure of the same success which Titus was favoured with at Corinth, will attend the appeal now made in the king's name to your liberality on this occasion. The distress being extremely great and urgent, I will shew you,

I. What the inequalities of Divine Providence call for at our hands—

That there are great inequalities in the states of men, is obvious, in all places and in all ages. Even in the country which was governed more immediately by God himself, it was declared, that "the poor should never cease out of the land^c:" much more, therefore, may we expect to see the same dispensations in our land.

Certainly there are great inequalities in the states of men—

[These occur, from *birth*, from *education*, from *accident*. One person is born to opulence, and, from the moment he comes into the world, enjoys all that this world can afford: another, from the first instant of his birth, is destitute of the most common necessities of life, or would be so if they were not supplied by the hand of charity — — — One, from early infancy, is instructed in some branch of knowledge that may fit him for a higher sphere; whilst the mind of another is left without any culture whatever: and hence we see some, even of the lower classes of society, rise to wealth and eminence; whilst others, for the want of such advantages, are left to perform the most degrading offices in life — — — And from what we call accident, that is, from occurrences which could neither have been anticipated nor avoided, have the most astonishing changes been produced; the rich being reduced to penury, and the poor being elevated to situations of wealth and dignity. The greatest acquisitions have been made by some unforeseen event, that has prepared the way for them, and almost forced them, as it were, upon us. On the other

^b ver. 16.

^c Deut. xv. 11.

hand, what bereavements have been suffered, from fire, from inundation, from reverses in trade, from the failure of others, from war, from civil commotion, or even from sickness, which has incapacitated men for their proper duties ! — — —]

And what do these call for at our hands ?

[Are the rich to sit down satisfied, as if their abundance was given them for themselves alone ? or are they not rather to consider themselves as stewards of the Lord, appointed by him to minister to the necessities of their poorer brethren ? God himself, in the wilderness, shewed us what his end was, in so diversifying the lots of men. He gave to his people manna from the clouds of heaven ; and he appointed that every one should gather an omer of it daily, for his own use. But it frequently happened, through some accidental circumstance, that some gathered less than the measure prescribed, and some, perhaps through illness, gathered none at all : yet, without any concerted plan, it constantly happened, that if some of a family gathered less than their proper measure, others had gathered more : and in all the families of Israel, for the space of forty years, it was found, that when the whole of a family put their gatherings together, they amounted to the precise quantity that was enjoined ; “those who had gathered much having nothing over, and those who had gathered little having no lack^d.” Now God would have us also to know, that all which we have, however laboriously gathered up by us, was His gift, and given by him for the express purpose of administering to the necessities of our more indigent brethren. True, we are not called now to put *all we have* into a common stock ; but we are called to “make *our abundance* a supply for the necessities of others ;” that so there may be *such a measure* of “equality,” as will consist with a due maintenance of all the different orders in civil and social life.]

With these inequalities we shall be well satisfied, if we consider,

II. The vast advantages derived from them—

Exceeding great benefits arise from such dispensations : for,

1. They call forth *from men* the greatest possible exercise of *grace*—

[To all classes of the community, the poor as well as the rich, are these dispensations truly beneficial. The *poor* derive instruction, which they would not attain in any other way : they learn both *resignation* to the Divine will, and *dependence*

^d See Exod. xvi. 16—18.

on the care of heaven. If tempted at any moment to repine, they learn to say, “ Shall a *living* man complain ? ” If I had my desert, it is not bodily sustenance that I should want, but a drop of water to cool my tongue in hell — — — I see the birds, that plow not, nor sow, nor gather into barns, have food in due season provided for them : why, then, should I despond ? The God that feedeth the ravens, can feed me : and he will rather send me food by the very ravens themselves, than suffer me to want what he sees to be good for me.’ — — —

The rich, too, are taught most invaluable lessons by what they see around them. From beholding the distresses of others, they learn to *sympathize* with the afflicted—(what an invaluable lesson is that !) They learn, also, *self-denial*, which they gladly practise, “ that they may have to give to him that needeth.” And I hesitate not to say, that they have more exquisite pleasure in any instance of self-denial, than any person upon earth has in the most unbridled self-indulgence. But what shall I say of the delight they feel in acts of *beneficence* ? This is the very occupation, if I may so speak, of God himself, “ who is good to all, and whose tender mercy is over all his works.” This, too, is pre-eminently the point in which they are conformed to the image of “ their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ; who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich^e.”

And now tell me, I pray you, whether these different classes be not greatly benefited, when called to the exercise of such graces ; for which there would be comparatively no scope, if these inequalities in providence did not exist ? — — —]

2. They bring to God the greatest possible acquisition of *glory*—

[Take all these persons in their respective stations ; and see how all of them admire and adore God for the manifestations which he thus gives of his providence and grace ; the poor, in having their wants so seasonably supplied ; and the rich, in being made God’s honoured instruments of good to man — — — This is very particularly noticed by St. Paul, in the following context ; and in comparison of this honour accruing to God, the relief conferred upon the poor he accounts as nothing : “ The administration of this service,” says he, “ not only supplieth the want of the saints, (that is comparatively a small matter,) but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God ; while, by the experiment of this ministration, they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men ; and by their prayer for you, who long after you for

the exceeding grace of God in you." And then he adds, with a heart overflowing with gratitude to God, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift^f!"

Now, if there were no such inequalities, there would be no scope for the rectifying of them; and, consequently, none for the adorations and thanksgivings offered unto God by those for whom he had so mercifully interposed. Say, then, whether these inequalities be not, on the whole, an unspeakable blessing to mankind; and whether, instead of repining at them, we ought not to adore and magnify our God, who makes such use of them, for the exercise of such grace, and for the manifestation of such glory unto men?]

Let me not, however, forget your necessities, brethren, whilst I plead for the relief of others: but let me ENTREAT you,

1. To seek from God the supplies which you yourselves need—

[None of your fellow-creatures, how destitute soever they may be in respect of temporal necessities, are half so necessitous as you, in relation to your spiritual condition. In this respect, all, whether rich or poor, are on a level. Truly, there is a sad "equality" with respect to this: all being not only "wretched and miserable," in a general view, but "poor, and blind, and naked," in particular. And who shall give you relief? Shall any fellow-creature be able to succour you? No: the best man on earth has "no more oil in his vessel than is needful for himself." There is no help for any man, but "in Christ Jesus, in whom it has pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell;" and "from whose fulness he has ordained us to receive." Get then, I pray you, brethren, a just sense of your necessities; and look to Christ for a supply of them: for "he is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you, having always all-sufficiency in all things, may abound unto every good work^g."]

2. To impart to your fellow-creatures the relief which they need—

[The occasion is indeed urgent^h — — — And I may well call upon you to impart out of your abundance, according to your ability. Of course, some of you are able to give but little: but, "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath notⁱ." This, however, I must say, "He that soweth

^f 2 Cor. ix. 12—15.

^g 2 Cor. ix. 8.

^h Here the occasion, whatever it may be, should be set forth.

ⁱ ver. 12.

sparingly, shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully^k." Nor is it unwise for you to consider what changes may yet occur with respect to your own temporal condition: and how much you yourselves may hereafter need relief from the very persons you now relieve. In this view, I would say, for your encouragement, that "what you give to the poor, you lend to the Lord;" and in the hour of necessity he will repay you. Arise, then, all of you, to this good work; and "cast your bread upon the waters, that you may find it after many days." In heaven, at all events, you shall find it: for God has promised, that not so much as "a cup of cold water given for his sake shall lose its reward."

^k 2 Cor. ix. 6.

MMXXXVI.

THE BENEFIT ARISING FROM ATTENTION TO THE POOR.

2 Cor. ix. 12—15. *The administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; while by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the Gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; and by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.*

IN this happy country, benevolent institutions of every kind abound, insomuch that there is scarcely any distress to which human nature can be subjected, for which some appropriate provision is not made. — — — But of all charities, there are none that deserve our support more, than those which have respect to the poor in an hour of sickness, and provide for their temporal and spiritual wants at the same time. Such is the institution to which we are to call your attention this day. We will briefly set before you,

I. The nature of the institution—

[It is called 'A Visiting Society.' Its design is to find out the modest and industrious poor in a time of sickness, and to administer to them relief for their bodies, and, at the same time, instruction for their souls. For the better accomplishment of this design, the town and neighbourhood are

divided into districts; in each of which, two persons, one of each sex, are appointed to superintend their immediate vicinity, to inquire into such cases of distress as may come within their knowledge; and to afford them such relief as their immediate necessities may seem to require. As in such seasons the ears of men are more open to instruction, the visitors are to avail themselves of the opportunity thus afforded them, to direct the attention of the poor to the concerns of their souls, and to lead them to that adorable Saviour, who calls himself "The way, the truth, and the life." Of these visitors, there is a meeting once a month under the superintendence of their minister, to report what persons they have visited; and to be advised, in case of any difficulty, what is most fitting to be done. At those meetings also the accounts of every district are settled; and the book which contains them is kept open to the inspection of them all^a."]

From this short view of the institution may be judged—

II. Its great utility—

The words of our text refer to the contributions sent from Macedonia and Achaia to relieve the necessities of the saints at Jerusalem: and they mark with great distinctness the chief excellencies of the institution before us. Its obvious tendency is to advance,

1. The comfort of the poor—

[The poor in a time of health are happy; because their minds and habits are fitted to their state. But in a time of sickness their situation is truly pitiable; because they are unable to procure those comforts which their necessities require. Their very application for parochial relief sometimes subjects them to unkindness: and those, who have been familiar with them in a season of prosperity, too often neglect them in a time of need^b. Conceive then at such a season a visitor coming to them, and not only tendering to them that relief which they could not have obtained from any other source, but expressing the tenderest sympathy with them under their affliction: What a balm must this be to the wounded feelings of the poor sufferer! If the rich, who are accustomed to kindness from their friends, find it doubly

^a This records what has been done for about fifty years under the Author's ministry at Cambridge. Of course, this head must vary, according to the institution, in aid of which the Sermon is preached.

^b See Prov. xix. 7.

acceptable at such a season, what must the poor man feel at the unexpected and unsolicited attentions of a perfect stranger!

But conceive the poor man now for the first time led to call upon his God; now instructed in the knowledge of a Saviour; now blessed with the first dawn of spiritual light, and begotten to a hope full of immortality: conceive him now saying with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted:" "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I learned thy law:" How altered is his state! How peaceful is his mind! How exceeding joyful is he in all his tribulation!

Know ye then that such effects have frequently arisen from the exertions of those who are engaged in this good work; and it is the manifest tendency of the institution to produce them. This therefore may well recommend the institution itself to your support.]

2. The welfare of all engaged in it—

[To enter cordially into a work of this kind is no small exercise of grace: it truly displays "the exceeding grace of God in us:" and where grace is so exercised, it will assuredly be strengthened and confirmed. God has said, that "he who watereth, shall be watered also himself." And we will appeal to all who have ever visited the chambers of the sick, and laboured for the spiritual welfare of their fellow-creatures, whether they have not been richly repaid by the blessing of God poured out upon their own souls? We know assuredly, that in proportion as any have offered unto God these sacrifices of love, they have been made by him to feast upon their own sacrifice.

But further, we are told in our text, that the persons relieved will offer up "their prayers" to God in behalf of those who relieve them: and is this a small benefit? Possibly the prayers may be only devout aspirations to God, such as "God bless you!" but shall such prayers go forth in vain? If God hears the cries of the injured, and punishes their oppressors, will he not hear and answer the prayers of men when offered for their benefactors? No doubt he will; and will recompense into the bosoms of the benevolent every benefit they have conferred.

Nor is it a small benefit to such benevolent persons that their names are respected, and their company desired. True indeed, we are not to engage in such services with a view to the applause of man: but we are not to despise the approbation and love of our fellow-creatures, but rather to accept it as an expression of God's kindness to our souls. See how Job's exertions in this way were recompensed^d: and was this

^c Jam. v. 4.

^d Job xxix. 11—13.

a despicable reward? But consider how such benefactors are loved by the objects whom they relieve; “how greatly they are longed after for the exceeding grace of God in them.” How do the poor people count the hours, and almost the minutes, when these kind friends are expected to arrive! Truly this is a great honour from the Lord, and an unspeakable comfort to those who have rendered themselves so respected and beloved.]

3. The honour of the Gospel—

[Of this also the text particularly speaks. These kind offices are regarded both by God and man as a “professed subjection to the Gospel of Christ.” The Gospel expressly requires these offices of love. “Pure religion,” we are told, “is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction :” and again it is said, “Bear ye one another’s burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^f.” When therefore these offices are performed, the Gospel appears, in its true light, a religion of love.

And here we cannot but observe, how such conduct in the professors of the Gospel is calculated to silence all its enemies. Many cry out against the Gospel as inculcating faith only, and leading its advocates to neglect good works. But where shall we find among the enemies of the Gospel such institutions as *these*? where shall we find that a regard for the *souls* of men forms a leading feature in any charity of theirs? It is under the Gospel only that *these* institutions flourish; and no sooner does any one receive “the truth as it is in Jesus,” than he delights to aid such institutions to the utmost of his power. Truly this is most honourable to the Gospel: and that which so adorns the doctrine of God our Saviour, must needs be itself worthy of universal support.]

4. The glory of God—

[Doubtless it is not in the power of man to add any thing to the glory of his God. Yet, inasmuch as these institutions lead men to acknowledge the providence of God, and to adore him for his gracious interposition in their behalf, they may be justly said to advance the glory of God. And this view of the subject is repeatedly mentioned both in the text and context^g. The visitor may possibly, in the first instance, be regarded as the sole source of the benefit conferred: but his instructions soon lead the grateful person to behold the hand of God, and to render thanks to HIM as the true and only source of good. Then the benefactor is viewed in his true light, even like the angel sent by God to deliver Peter from his prison: but God is viewed as “the Author and Giver of the gift.” Then

^c Jam. i. 27. ^f Gal. vi. 2. ^g See 2 Cor. viii. 19. and ver. 11.

"thanksgivings abound to HIM;" and the person who perhaps thought nothing of his God before, now adores him and magnifies him from his inmost soul. This is the only tribute that man can pay to his Maker: but it is "a sacrifice most pleasing unto God."]

CONCLUSION—

[We now call upon you all to adopt the language of our text, and say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"

The true import of these words is not generally understood. It is supposed, that, because our blessed Lord and Saviour calls himself "The gift of God," and is undoubtedly the greatest of all God's gifts to man, the passage must relate to him: but, both from the text and context, it is evident that we must understand it as relating to the alms which were collected for the service of the Church at Jerusalem. Speaking of the part which Titus had taken in this measure, St. Paul says, "Thanks be to God, who put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you^h:" where it is observable, that he traces the blessing to God as its true Author, and returns thanks to God for it. So in our text he speaks of "Thanksgivings to God" occasioned by it, and "God as glorified for it," and "the exceeding grace of God" as manifested in it. Hence the import of it undeniably is, that "Thanks" should be given by all to God for so "unspeakable a gift."

And truly it is "the gift of God:" it is God alone that has put it into the heart of so many persons to unite in so good a work. It is to his grace alone that we can trace this tender concern for the temporal and eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures. Man, by nature, has it not: and those who are ignorant of the Gospel have it not: they may talk about good works; but this is a work in which they never engage. We must therefore glorify God for it, as being the only true source from whence it proceeds.

And it may well be called an "*unspeakable* gift." It is unspeakable, whether as existing in the visitors, or as operating on those who are visited. No grace can justly be considered as a light matter, since the smallest portion of it that can exist in the soul is of more value than the whole world. Of what value then must such "*exceeding* grace" be, such grace as most assimilates us to God himself! Was "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" most displayed in this, that "when he was rich, he for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich?" This is the pattern which the visitors desire to imitate, so far at least as, by the most self-denying offices of love, to contribute to the utmost of their power to the happiness of their afflicted brethren.

^h 2 Cor. viii. 16.

ⁱ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

If we look at the effects which have followed from their exertions, these are “unspeakable” indeed: for, in addition to the temporal comfort administered to Christ himself in many of his poor members^k, I doubt not but that there are at this very hour before the throne of God several, whose first thoughts about religion originated altogether in the instructions received from this society. Had there been but *one* soul brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel by means of this institution, the labours of all connected with it would have been richly recompensed: but we say again, that *several*, we doubt not, will have to bless God for it to all eternity.

Let all then give thanks to God that such an institution exists; and let all contribute liberally to its support — — — We beg to remind you all, that the contributors, no less than the visitors, are accessory to all the good that is done by it; and may expect a blessing on their own souls: and we close our subject with that admonition of the Apostle, “He who soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; and he who soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifullyⁱ.”]

^k Matt. xxv. 40.

ⁱ ver. 6.

MMXXXVII.

EFFICACY OF THE GOSPEL.

2 Cor. x. 3—5. *Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

EVERY thing, however good, may be made to appear in a disadvantageous light, if we choose to put a perverse construction upon it: and the more diligent any person is in approving himself to God, the more must he expect to suffer from misrepresentation and calumny. His humility will be called superstition; his zeal, ostentation; his devotion, enthusiasm; and his whole deportment, hypocrisy. No man ever laboured to do what was right more than the Apostle Paul; yet no man was ever more calumniated. There was no self-denial which he did not exercise, no suffering which he did not cheerfully

endure, for the good of others : yet through the artifices of false teachers, who sought to establish their own influence on the ruins of his, every thing he did became to him an occasion of reproach. There were great disorders in the Corinthian Church, which he sought to rectify. He in the first instance adopted the mildest methods : when these were ineffectual, he threatened to exert his apostolic authority : when still he could not prevail, he was extremely averse to use the necessary severity ; and forbore to do it, in hopes that his lenity might conciliate their regards, and reduce them to a willing obedience. But they construed all this change of conduct as the result of guile, or timidity. They considered him as influenced by a view to his own carnal interests, and as being unworthy of their respect in proportion as he strove to merit it. Of this he complains in the passage before us. He assures his adversaries that, though like other men he was still encompassed with infirmities, he was not actuated by any considerations of ease, or honour, or interest, but was intent on mortifying every evil thought in himself, as well as of checking it in them : and that, as he was impelled by a sense of duty in the whole of his conduct towards them, so, if his present kind entreaties should be without effect, he was ready and determined to exert his apostolic authority in casting out of the Church all obstinate offenders, and in inflicting on them also, by his miraculous powers, some heavy judgment.

This seems to be the import of the text as it stands connected with the context. But if we divest it of the peculiarities arising from the occasion, we shall find in it a summary view of the effects produced by the Gospel in the Apostle's own mind, and, through his instrumentality, on the minds of others also. In discoursing upon it we shall be led to shew,

I. The opposition which sinners make to God—

We might here lay open the actions of men, and shew their contrariety to the commands of God.

But the text speaks of “imagination and of high things which exalt themselves,” not merely against the authority, but “even against the knowledge, of God.” We must therefore mark the rebellion of men as it shews itself in their “*thoughts*” which serve as “strong-holds” in which they are intrenched and fortified, and by means of which they exclude God from their hearts.

They fortify themselves then,

1. By proud thoughts—

[It is scarcely credible that such an insect as man should exalt himself with such impious presumption in the presence of his God. If we assert the authority of God, and vindicate his claim to their hearts, they reply, like Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord; neither will I obey his voice^a.”]

2. By unbelieving thoughts—

[We declare what will certainly be the issue of the contest; and that, if they will not bow to the sceptre of his grace, they shall be broken in pieces with a rod of iron^b: and that, if they will not have Christ to reign over them, he will call forth his executioners to slay them before him^c. But not one word of this will they believe. They deny that God will ever execute his threatenings, or that they have any thing to fear at his hands^d.]

3. By worldly thoughts—

[When we summon them to surrender themselves up to God, they tell us, that at some more convenient season they may listen to us; but at present they are so occupied with the cares or pleasures of life, that they cannot find leisure for such concerns as these. To all our pressing invitations, they either answer, more civilly, “I pray thee have me excused,” or, more rudely, “I cannot come^e.”]

4. By self-righteous thoughts—

[When they are driven, as it were, from their out-posts, they raise interior fortifications with great zeal and industry: they encompass themselves with “works of righteousness,” and there insist upon stipulations and agreements with God. They will pay him such a tribute; they will perform such

^a Exod. v. 2. See also Ps. xii. 4. and Jer. xlv. 16.

^b Ps. ii. 9.

^c Luke xix. 27.

^d Ps. xciv. 7. with Mal. ii. 17.

^e Luke xiv. 18—20.

services; they will surrender up a portion of their hearts, provided their old friends and allies may be permitted to continue unmolested in the remainder. The terms of the Gospel are too humiliating for them: and rather than they will come like Benhadad, trusting solely on the mercy of the king of Israel^f, they will die in the breach, and be buried in the ruins of their citadel.]

5. By desponding thoughts—

[God's entrance into the heart is not unfrequently obstructed by these, as much as by any other thoughts whatever. And it is surprising to see with what obstinacy they are defended. Sinners will even bring Scripture itself to support them against God, and to justify their rejection of his proffered mercy. They are as studious to persuade themselves that "there is no hope" for them, as once they were to assure themselves that there was no ground for fear^g.]

But impregnable as these "strong-holds" appear, God can "cast them down." To evince this, we proceed to shew,

II. The means by which God overcomes them—

God in this warfare does not make use of "carnal weapons"—

[*The sword of the civil magistrate is not wanted in it.* It may indeed be properly used to suppress any evils which injure society, and to protect the godly in the free enjoyment of religious liberty^h: but it must not be put forth to propagate the truthⁱ. Let Mahometans bathe their swords in blood, and Papists kindle their fires, to make proselytes to their religion; but God abhors such measures; and has declared, that "they who take the sword shall perish with the sword^k."

Neither are his servants to call in *artifice* to their aid. They are indeed, in some sense, to "become all things to all men, that by all means they may save some^l:" but they are not to make any sinful compliances: they are to stand upon their own ground: they must "have their conversation in the world, not with fleshly wisdom, but with simplicity and godly sincerity^m;" they must not attempt to exercise craft, or to "catch men by guileⁿ;" but, "renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty, they must commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God^o."

^f 2 Kings xx. 31, 32. ^g Ezek. xxxvii. 11. Jer. ii. 25.

^h Rom. xiii. 3, 4.

ⁱ Zech. iv. 6.

^k Matt. xxvi. 52.

^l 1 Cor. ix. 22.

^m 2 Cor. i. 12.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 16.

^o 2 Cor. iv. 2.

Nor is *oratory* of any use in this warfare. St. Paul was qualified beyond most to fight with this weapon, if he had judged it expedient: but he laid it aside as an incumbrance: he knew that, instead of advancing the interests of his Lord, it would “render the cross of Christ of none effect^p,” and therefore he determined to “preach not with the enticing words of man’s wisdom^q,” or “in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but in those only which the Holy Ghost teacheth^r.”]

That which he renders effectual, is the simple preaching of the Gospel—

[The law is usually that which first shakes the foundations of the citadel, and batters down the fortifications with which it was encompassed: yea, the Gospel itself also is at first alarming, because it proposes a remedy to persons perishing in their sins, and consequently apprises them of their danger, which they were not before aware of. But when it has convinced them of their guilt and misery, then it speaks peace unto their souls; and sweetly constrains them to yield up themselves unreservedly to God, as their reconciled God and Saviour^s — — —

Not that it has this power in itself: it is in itself as weak as was the sound of rams’ horns which cast down the walls of Jericho^t: but it is “mighty through God;” and, when accompanied by the operations of his Spirit, it compels the stoutest rebel to deliver up the keys of his citadel, and surrender at discretion.]

The victories gained by this are perfect and complete—

[The victories obtained by carnal weapons, may be followed by the subjugation of the vanquished people: but no conqueror could expect his newly acquired subjects to become instantly his active and faithful allies. Yet this invariably follows the triumphs of the Gospel: the vanquished sinner begins to fight as zealously for God as ever he fought against him. Moreover, as his *thoughts* and *imaginations* were the strongholds and fortifications whereby he maintained his stand against God, so now they are employed in his service, and are instrumental in repelling all the attacks of his enemies: “they are brought, not only into captivity, but also into obedience to Christ.”

Now he entertains *humble* thoughts, abhorring himself for ever rebelling against so gracious a God and Saviour; and

^p 1 Cor. i. 17.

^q 1 Cor. ii. 4.

^r 1 Cor. ii. 13.

^s 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^t Josh. vi. 20.

detesting the base servitude to which he submitted under the government of Satan. These, in proportion as they are entertained, form a very strong rampart around his soul.

Now he cherishes also *jealous* thoughts, aware of the subtilty of his great adversary, and of the traitors which yet remain within his own bosom. He stands upon his watch-tower, and guards every avenue whereby his enemy may again approach to hurt him.

Now also he raises up *grateful* thoughts, magnifying and adoring that love wherewith his blessed Lord has loved him, and that grace whereby his God and Father has distinguished him^u. These form a bulwark that may defy all the confederate hosts of earth and hell.

Now moreover he forms *resolute* thoughts. He is menaced by an ungodly world; but he sets them all at defiance. Is he told that he shall be imprisoned and put to death for his adherence to Christ? He answers, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself^x;" "I am willing not only to be bound, but also to die for my Lord's sake^y:" "Yea, if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all, and desire that you also will joy and rejoice with me^z."

In short, he labours that "*every* thought" which can give advantage to the enemy, may be "cast down," and *every* thought which can maintain the authority and promote the honour of God, may be established in the soul: so entirely does Christ overcome the strong man, and convert to his own use all his spoils^a.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. How to judge of our conversion—

[Our words or actions are a very inadequate criterion whereby to judge: for, though they must of necessity be good if we are converted, and a want of piety in them will incontestably prove us unconverted, yet there may be nothing manifestly exceptionable in them, while we are still ignorant of Christ and of his salvation. But the thoughts will form an infallible rule of judgment. "As a man thinketh in his heart," says Solomon, "so is he^b." Examine therefore whether proud, unbelieving, worldly, self-righteous, and desponding thoughts are subdued within you; and whether humble, jealous, grateful, and resolute thoughts are in habitual exercise. Far be it from us to say, that men are not to employ their thoughts about worldly things; for their duties in social life absolutely require that they should do so: but, to whatever

^u 1 John iii. 1.

^x Acts xx. 24.

^y Acts xxi. 13.

^z Phil. ii. 17, 18.

^a Luke xi. 21, 22.

^b Prov. xxiii. 7.

point our thoughts lead us when they are wholly unconfined, that will shew the real disposition of our minds: if we are carnal and worldly, our thoughts will be running out after things of a carnal and worldly nature: if, on the contrary, we are spiritual, then will our thoughts, which are known to God only, be spiritual and heavenly.]

2. How to act when we are converted—

[What is spoken proverbially in reference to the expenditure of money, may very fitly be applied to this subject; ‘Take care of little things; and great ones will take care of themselves.’ Be attentive to your thoughts; and we shall have no fear about your actions. There is not any thing done, but it has been previously transacted in the thoughts. The heart is the womb in which every thing is first conceived, whether it be good or evil^c. Out of the abundance that is there, will the mouth speak, and the members act^d. Let us then attend to the advice of Solomon, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life^e.” Let us endeavour to train the thoughts for God. Let us not suffer them to roam without restraint; but frequently arrest them, and inquire into their nature and tendency. Then shall we become ornaments to our holy profession, and acquire an increasing meetness for heaven, where “EVERY” thought will indeed be captivated to the obedience and enjoyment of Christ.]

^c Jam. i. 15.

^d Matt. xii. 34, 35.

^e Prov. iv. 23.

MMXXXVIII.

THE FAITHFUL MINISTER’S DESIRES.

2 Cor. x. 15, 16. *Having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, to preach the Gospel in the regions beyond you.*

THE Apostle Paul was a man of an enlarged heart: he panted for the salvation of the whole world, and to the utmost of his power laboured to promote it. But, in his labours, he was under the direction of his Divine Master, who assigned to him the path in which he was to run. To the course that was prescribed to him he carefully adhered; neither going beside it, to interfere with others; nor going beyond it, as obtruding himself any where without an express

commission. In these respects, he differed widely from some who sought to establish themselves on the foundation which he had laid at Corinth, and to subvert his influence in the Church which he had planted. To remedy the evils which had been introduced by them, he meditated another visit to that city; and hoped, after rectifying all abuses there, to proceed to other regions beyond them, for the purpose of diffusing more widely, than he had yet done, the Gospel of Christ. This intention, which he specifies in the words of our text, will lead me to set before you,

I. The desires of a faithful minister, in reference to any Church which he may have planted—

He will desire their growth in every grace—

[However numerous his converts may be, no faithful minister will be satisfied, unless they make their profiting to appear. Every believer is enjoined to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^a,” and it is in that way alone that he can either promote the honour of God, or advance his own happiness — — — Like persons engaged in a race, he must “forget what is behind, and reach forward to that which is before; and press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus^b. A mother, however rejoicing over her infant child, would soon cease to rejoice, if she saw no advancement in his stature: and so can no faithful minister find pleasure in his converts, if he see them not gradually advancing in the divine life, and “growing up towards the measure of the full stature of Christ.”]

He will desire their growth in faith more particularly—

[Faith is the root of every grace; and according to its vital operations in us, will be our growth in all that is good. When our Lord inculcated on his Apostles the exercise of a forgiving spirit, they replied, “Lord, increase our *faith*^c!” One would have supposed that they should rather have said, “Increase our *love*.” But they judged well; because their love was sure to be augmented in proportion to their faith. It is precisely in the same view that St. Paul speaks to the Corinthians, when he refers to an expected “increase of their faith.” It is by increasing discoveries of the great mystery of redemption, and of the glory of God as displayed in it, that

^a 2 Pet. iii. 18.

^b Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^c Luke xvii. 3—5.

we are to be assimilated to the image of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ^d; and to be rendered meet for the service of God on earth, or the enjoyment of him in heaven — — —]

The Apostle's hopes of ultimately proceeding to regions beyond them, lead me yet further to notice,

II. The desires of a faithful minister, in reference to the whole world—

A truly benevolent mind will extend its efforts as far as possible for the welfare of mankind: it would not willingly leave one to "perish, for whom Christ died." In diffusing the blessings of salvation to the whole world, the pious minister,

1. Will labour personally with all his might—

[A minister's first concern is, to instruct the people committed to his charge: nor will the most enlarged philanthropy justify a neglect of his more appropriate duties. But, whilst it is his duty to pray, "Thy kingdom come," it is his duty to exert himself, according to his ability, to extend that kingdom to the very ends of the earth. If by his own personal labours he can carry the Gospel to foreign lands, he will account it his highest honour to engage in that service; and, like the Apostle, will regard every advance which he makes, a step towards regions and services yet beyond. But if his proper labours be stationary, he will exert all his influence to accomplish, through the instrumentality of others, what he cannot effect by his own personal exertions — — —]

2. Will look for the concurrence and aid of all his people—

[St. Paul hoped that his Corinthian converts would unite in furthering, to the utmost of their power, his efforts for the benefit of others beyond them. It is possible enough that the partiality of some towards him might have made them desirous of enjoying his continued labours, even at the expense of others whom he hoped to benefit. But such selfish wishes are decidedly wrong. We should be willing to make sacrifices for the good of others; and to "seek *not our own profit*, but the profit of many, that they may be saved^e." By such sacrifices the people do, in fact, concur in promoting and propagating the Gospel of the kingdom: and, if to these they add their pecuniary contributions and their prayers, for the furtherance of this good work, they are, in the truest and sublimest sense, "fellow-workers with God." To this, there-

^d 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^e 1 Cor. x. 33.

fore, the faithful minister will endeavour to bring his people : that, through the united efforts of many, that work may be done, which cannot be effected by individual exertion.]

Let me now ENTREAT you,

1. To improve your own privileges—

[Through the tender mercy of God, “the Gospel is come unto you;” and many of you, I trust, have been led to “believe in Christ, to the saving of your souls.” But let none of you continue “weak in faith.” *Your faith must increase*: your views must be more enlarged, your affiance more simple, your confidence more firm: you must “be strong in faith, if you would give glory unto God.” Remember, that it is “to perfect that which is lacking in your faith,” that our labours are directed: and you yourselves must ever keep that object in view. Go on then, from grace to grace: and let this testimony be borne respecting you, that “your faith and love grow exceedingly.”]

2. To extend those privileges to all around you—

[There is no need that any of you should overstep the line assigned you by Divine Providence: but, if your personal efforts are limited, your wishes and your prayers should know no bounds. I call upon you, then, to help forward the work of God in the world. Assist, to the utmost of your power, the different societies that are established for the conversion whether of Jews or Gentiles: for in this way, though you yourselves are stationary, the work of God will be advanced by you; seeing that the active agents of those societies, both at home and abroad, will “be enlarged by you abundantly.”]

MMXXXIX.

THE FOLLY OF PRIDE AND BOASTING.

2 Cor. x. 18. *Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*

ONE would be ready to suppose, that the more any person excelled in every thing that was good, the more he would be filled with self-complacency; and that the less holy any person was, the more he would be humbled under a sense of his vileness. But observation and experience attest that the very reverse of this is true. The godly do indeed enjoy the testimony of a good conscience; but they are far from

boasting of their own superior worth; they rather “prefer others in honour before themselves,” and account themselves “less than the least of all saints.” But formalists and hypocrites are ever ready to commend themselves on account of their fancied excellencies, and to assume a credit which does not belong to them.

There were at Corinth some of this description—some conceited teachers, who had entered into the Apostle’s labours, and were endeavouring to advance their own influence in the Church by weakening and subverting his. To put the Corinthians on their guard against them, St. Paul shews them how different had been his conduct from that of these vain-glorious men: he had brought the Gospel to those regions where it had never been heard before; whereas they were “boasting in another man’s line of things made ready to their hand:” he had moved in the sphere appointed him by God; they were going beside and beyond the line marked out for them: he had sought only the glory of the Lord; while they were puffed up with pride, and seeking their own glory. He then lays down a rule, applicable indeed to these teachers in the first instance, but equally proper for us also. That “not they who commend themselves will be approved, but those whom the Lord commendeth.”

In discoursing on these words we shall shew,

I. From whence self-approbation arises—

The hearts of men are by nature proud: and their pride finds abundant scope for exercise;

1. From their over-rating the quality of their actions—

[If what they do *appears* to be good, they are not strict in inquiring whether it be really so: they do not wish to detect those deficiencies which might render them dissatisfied with themselves. They do not examine *the principle* from which their actions flow, or *the manner* in which they are performed, or *the end* for which they are done: whereas these are the things which alone can determine the real quality of their actions. They take for granted that all is right, because they see nothing wrong; and thus are filled with self-admiration

and self-complacency, when, if they formed a proper estimate of their conduct, they would rather be filled with shame and self-abasement.]

2. From their judging of them by an erroneous standard—

[Though men are not nice and scrupulous in weighing their actions, they involuntarily and imperceptibly judge of them by some standard. Now the standard by which they try them, is that of popular opinion, and general practice: and whatever stands this test, they conclude to be deserving of praise. They never think of weighing themselves in the balance of the sanctuary: the popular scale is more suited to their minds: *that* is not turned by small matters: it is so favourably constructed that a small weight of virtue will over-balance a heavy load of iniquity; and the many grains of allowance thrown into it are almost sure to make it preponderate in their favour. No wonder then that they applaud themselves, when, if they took the word of God as their standard, they would find cause for nothing but humiliation and contrition.]

3. From their ascribing them to a wrong cause—

[Because they are free agents in all that they do, they suppose that the merit of every good action must belong to them. But they forget that “God is the sole author of every good and perfect gift;” that it is “he who of his own good pleasure gives us both to will and to do:” and that consequently all the honour is due to him alone. Granting then that their actions were really as excellent as their overweening conceit would paint them, yet they would have no ground for self-commendation. The more they did for God, the more they would be indebted to God; by whose agency alone they were either inclined, or empowered, to do any thing that was good. But when they leave God out of their thoughts, and ascribe their virtues to their own will and power, they must of necessity contract habits of self-preference and self-esteem.]

4. From their overlooking their defects—

[The proud and vain-glorious reflect only on what they do; and never think at all of what they leave undone, or of the deficiencies which are found in their very best actions. They perform one duty perhaps, and neglect many. They attend to some injunction of the second table, but forget entirely the precepts contained in the first. They mark their observance of the letter of a command, but quite overlook their inattention to its spirit. They will have no more gods than one: but they will not “love that God with all their heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.” They will “draw

nigh to God with their lips," but will not inquire whether they have "worshipped him in spirit and in truth." What can we expect from such partial views of their conduct, but that they will vaunt and boast themselves, as if they were worthy of the highest commendation?]

Having traced the self-applause of men to its true source; we proceed to shew,

II. The folly and danger of it—

To illustrate this, let two things be considered :

1. God will not regulate his judgment by theirs—

[Man is often influenced by the opinions of his fellow-creatures; and it is proper that he should be so; because others may have more accurate information than he, or be more capable of forming a just conclusion from the premises before him. But "unto God all things are naked and open:" however specious any appearances may be, He cannot be deceived: He will "lay righteousness as a line or plummet" to the souls of men, and thereby mark the smallest deviations from perfect rectitude. In vain will the boaster vaunt before him; for he will with one single interrogation confound him utterly, and lay him in the dust. In vain will the self-deceiver bring forward in his defence the good actions that he has done; for his God and Judge will indignantly dismiss him as unworthy of the smallest regard^a. To have the approbation of men will avail him nothing: for "God will not judge according to appearance, but will judge righteous judgment:" "he will shew, that many things which are highly esteemed among men, are an abomination in his sight^b;" and, when he passes sentence on them, he will "be justified in his saying, and and clear when he judgeth^c."]

2. Instead of sanctioning, he will reprove, their conceit—

[Nothing is more odious in the sight of God than pride: "the proud in heart, we are told, are an abomination to the Lord^d." Indeed "pride was not made for man:" it assimilates us, as much as any thing can do, to the devil himself: and will certainly bring us into the same condemnation with him^e. Our own high opinion of ourselves will have an effect directly opposite to that which we wish. It will cause our God to "resist^f," abase^g, and utterly destroy us^h.

^a Matt. vii. 21—23.

^b Luke xvi. 15.

^c Ps. li. 4.

^d Prov. xvi. 5.

^e 1 Tim. iii. 6.

^f Jam. iv. 6.

^g Dan. iv. 30—32, 37.

^h Isai. x. 12—16. with Luke xviii. 14.

We need go no further to prove that men, “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, *are not wise*ⁱ.”]

That we may be preserved from this most destructive habit, we will point out,

III. The most effectual antidotes—

1. Study the holy law of God—

[That is the only true standard of good and evil: and “by that is the knowledge of sin.” That reaches to the inmost thoughts and dispositions, as well as to the outward acts.—It was by a view of that, as extending to every desire of the soul, that Paul was made to feel himself a guilty and undone sinner^k: and that once understood, will bring all of us into the dust before God.]

2. Watch the motions of your own hearts—

[Little do we suspect how much evil we should discover, if we were to mark the motives and principles by which we are actuated. Even when we are influenced by a good principle in the first instance, Satan will find some occasion to sow tares with the wheat, and to defile our very best actions. Let us then exercise a holy jealousy over ourselves: let us not be too confident, even when we are most unconscious of any secret evil^l: let us especially be on our guard against every self-complacent thought: and let us abase ourselves, that we may be exalted of our God.]

3. Bear in mind the strictness of the scrutiny in the day of judgment—

[God “weigheth” not our actions only, but “our spirits:” there is not a thought of our hearts that is not open to his all-seeing eye. He views at once the rule, and the observance of it; and every deviation from the line of absolute perfection is marked by him. True indeed it is, that whilst we are looking to the blood of Christ to cleanse us from our secret faults, and to the Spirit of Christ to perfect in us his good work, God will not “be extreme to mark what is done amiss:” but, if we harbour any secret lust, or indulge any unhallowed principle, our God will search it out, and judge us according to it^m. Our self-commendation will then avail us nothing; but we shall stand or fall according to the decision of an omniscient and unerring Judge.]

ⁱ ver. 12.

^l 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^k Rom. vii. 9.

^m 1 Cor. iv. 5.

MMXL.

GODLY JEALOUSY THE DUTY OF MINISTERS.

2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. *I am jealous over you with godly jealousy : for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

TO boast of ourselves is a mark of a weak and foolish mind. Yet there are occasions whereon it may be necessary, particularly where the welfare of the Church of God is concerned. It would have ill become the Apostle to sit down in silence under all the calumnies that were cast upon him as a designing and deceitful man, who sought only his own glory, whilst he was assuming a character which did not properly belong to him. In vindication of himself, he appeals to the plain, visible, acknowledged testimonies which God had given in his favour ; which far exceeded any which his opponents could produce, and equalled any which had ever been given to “ the very chiefest Apostles.” At the same time he entreats the Corinthians to “ bear with his folly” in mentioning these things, since it was not for his own sake, but for theirs, that he adverted to them.

Now the jealousy which he felt for the saints at Corinth is precisely such as every minister should feel for his people, exposed as they are to temptations on every side : and that it may be seen how necessary such a jealousy is, we shall shew,

I. In what near relation believers stand to Christ—

They are espoused to Christ—

[Christ is the Head and Husband of his Church. Under this character he is described by the Prophet Isaiah^a : it is also given him in the Gospel^b : and the Apostle Paul largely and repeatedly assigns it to him^c. In the book of Revelation also the Church is expressly represented as “ the Wife of the Lamb^d.”

^a Isai. liv. 5.

^c Rom. vii. 4. Eph. v. 32.

^b John iii. 29.

^d Rev. xix. 7.

Truly, if it had not been so plainly revealed, we could not have dared to entertain such a thought in our minds. That sinners, so guilty, so polluted as we are, should be admitted into so near and so endearing a relation to our incarnate God: how wonderful! how surpassing all knowledge, and all conception! Yet so it is: and both the Church at large, and every member of the Church, is a partaker of this honour.]

Into this relation they are brought by the ministry of the Gospel—

[The Apostle says, “I have espoused you to one husband.” Ministers may not unfitly be compared to Abraham’s servant, who was sent forth to seek a wife for his master’s son. They have received a commission from their Lord and Master: they make known to the children of men the excellencies of him in whose name they come: they look to God for the success of their labours: and by their means he works, “making persons willing in the day of his power.” Sinners thus wrought upon agree to take the Lord Jesus Christ as their Husband; and by their union with him they hope henceforth to “bring forth fruit unto God.” In him they see all that they can possibly desire; and on him they rely for the communication of it to their souls: they take him as their “wisdom, their righteousness, their sanctification, and redemption;” and they glory in him, even in him alone. Having thus accepted Christ for their all, they make a covenant with him, “a perpetual covenant not to be forgotten^e;” and they consecrate to him all that they are, and all that they have, to be disposed of from henceforth as his property according to his sovereign will and pleasure. They pledge themselves henceforth through grace to be entirely “for the Lord, and not for another^f,” and never more to yield their affections to any but him. This surrender the Lord Jesus Christ accepts; and to every one by whom it is made, he commissions his servants to proclaim in his name, “I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord^g.”]

But whilst on the one hand we contemplate their privileges, we must on the other hand consider,

II. The danger to which they are exposed—

It is not to be supposed that he who ruined their first parents in Paradise, will leave them in the quiet possession of this high honour: No; as he envied

^e Jer. l. 5.

^f Hos. iii. 3.

^g Hos. ii. 19, 20.

the happiness of man in innocence, and never rested till he had robbed him of it, so he envies all who are brought into this near relation to the Lord Jesus, and never ceases from his efforts to deprive them of it.

The state which becomes those who are thus espoused to Christ, is that of perfect simplicity—

[A person, espoused to a fellow-creature only, ought to possess a simplicity of mind towards him: she should have no interest, no desire, no wish distinct from his. Thus there should be a singleness of eye in all who are united in these holy bonds to our Lord Jesus Christ. There should be no dependence on any thing but on him alone. The constant habit of the believer's mind must be, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Nor must the betrothed person indulge a wish after any one but him to whom she is espoused: she must "forget her own people and her father's house, if she would have her Lord to find pleasure in her beauty^h." She must possess also a modest, humble, child-like spirit, free from all pride, conceit, and vain-glory. In a word, she must be wholly his, in body, soul, and spirit; "an Israelite indeed, and without guile."]

But from this state Satan is ever striving to divert us—

[Innumerable emissaries has he at his command ready to take advantage of us. Many even of our fellow-creatures are used by him as his instruments: many who are, in fact, no other than "false Apostles and deceitful workers," under his influence transform themselves into "Apostles of Christ," even as that wicked fiend himself assumes the semblance of an angel of lightⁱ. They will profess a great regard for truth, and under that garb will endeavour to commend their own erroneous principles. Under a profession of inculcating sublimer views of the Gospel, they will sap its very foundations, or build a superstructure altogether adverse to it, relaxing the obligations of the law, under a pretence of enhancing the excellency of the Gospel: and, as sure as any embrace their pernicious tenets, they are despoiled of all virgin modesty, and puffed up with pride and self-conceit. The same kind of artifices which Satan used in tempting Eve, he still makes use of by other serpents than he then inspired. He suggests the superior wisdom that will be acquired by embracing this or that dogma; and the gratification that will be

^h Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

ⁱ ver. 13—15.

derived from a compliance with such or such a temptation. He calls in question the import of such divine declarations as militate against his views, or at least the danger of acting in opposition to them: and by these devices he beguiles many to their everlasting ruin.]

Persons so tempted are generally unconscious of their danger; and hence arises,

III. The duty of those to whom God has committed the oversight of them—

The work of a minister is but just begun when he has been the means of bringing any soul to Christ: he has yet to watch over that soul, and to prepare it and make it ready for its destined honours.

At a period yet future is the servant to present the bride to her Lord and husband—

[Even the horrid and disgusting offices performed for the virgins who were to be presented to king Ahasuerus, may, when divested of the sensuality connected with them, serve to illustrate the purification necessary for every member of the Christian Church. In the great day of the Lord Jesus we are to present to him our every convert “as a chaste virgin.” Yea, the Lord Jesus Christ himself is now by his word and Spirit preparing the Church, “that he may then present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it may be holy and without blemish^k.” If she be not made ready for him, and “clothed in fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints^l,” she can never be acknowledged as his bride. Any fundamental error in faith, or any allowed deviation from his law in practice, will entirely make void the covenant entered into at the espousals, and will cut her off from any hope of that felicity after which she aspires: and thus will all the minister’s “labour prove in vain^m.”]

Till that period arrive, he must be jealous over her with a godly jealousy—

[If he see any declension from the simplicity that is in Christ, he must instantly raise his warning voice. If he see only a device of Satan whereby her piety may be endangered, and her mind may be in any respect corrupted, he must instantly put her on her guard. He is not to wink at any thing whether in doctrine or practice that is contrary to the mind of God. If there be only a secret leaning towards any

^k Eph. v. 25—27.

^l Rev. xix. 8.

^m Gal. iv. 11.

thing that is wrong, he must with all the solicitude of the tenderest parent point out the snare that Satan is laying for her feet. Her Divine Husband is "a jealous God:" and a corresponding jealousy in his ministers must be ever awake to the discernment of incipient danger, and the correction of the slightest error. This is "a godly jealousy:" it is the highest possible expression of love: and the minister who with most fidelity and affection discharges this duty, most approves himself to God, and displays the most valuable friendship towards man: "he watches for souls, as one that must give account."]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have given occasion for jealousy—

[Is it asked, Who are they? I answer, Those who have either declined in their love to Christ, or have not made their profiting to appear. What would any of you feel towards an object, who, after having solemnly betrothed herself to you, and once professed towards you the most ardent affection, had ceased to delight in your society, or shewed, that her more intimate acquaintance with you produced no increase of attachment towards you? Would your mind be easy? Would you be satisfied with such equivocal professions of regard? What then must the Lord Jesus Christ feel, and what should your ministers feel, when your whole spirit and conduct give so much reason for doubt and fear? They must be jealous; they ought to be jealous: and towards all who come under this character we must "change our voice." We do truly "stand in doubt of" such: and we are constrained to "travail in birth with them, as it were, a second time until Christ be formed in them." "Look well to yourselves, my brethren, that ye lose not the things that ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward:" for if ye draw back from the Lord Jesus Christ, either in heart or life, "his soul shall have no pleasure in you".]

2. Those in whom no visible occasion of jealousy exists—

[We bless our God who has kept you thus far faithful to your engagements. Truly, "he who hath established you in the midst of such manifold temptations is God"—— But still, though *we* have no occasion to be jealous over you, it becomes you to be jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy. For who can tell what a day or an hour may bring forth? David, when walking on the top of his house, little thought what a snare Satan had laid for him: and you little

ⁿ Gal. iv. 19, 20.

^o Heb. x. 38.

know how sorely he may thrust at you before another day has passed over your heads. "Be not high-minded, but fear." "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Take notice from time to time how your minds stand affected to the Lord Jesus Christ: mariners are often forced out of their track by currents, and never discover their deviations till they have made their observations afresh. Make your observations then: Do you delight more in secret communion with Christ? Do you think less of every sacrifice you are called to make for him? Is it more and more the one endeavour of your soul to please him? And are you looking forward with increasing desire for that day when you shall be intimately and indissolubly united to him, and spend an eternity in the fruition of his love? By such marks as these you may judge of your own state, and acquire a confidence in relation to his judgment also. Leave nothing in suspense. Give yourselves to him: walk with him: cleave to him with full purpose of heart: and "be diligent that ye may at last be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless^p."

And now to his holy keeping we commend you; even to him, "who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen^q."

p 2 Pet. iii. 14, 17.

q Jude, ver. 24.

MMXLI.

ST. PAUL'S ZEAL ILLUSTRATED AND IMPROVED.

2 Cor. xi. 23—29. *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes, save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?*

THE people of the world are in the habit of representing religious persons as defective in every mental attainment, and negligent in the discharge of every social duty: and it becomes Christians not only to cut off all occasion for such reproach, but so to conduct themselves as to be able to appeal to all who know them, that they are in no respect below any other people who are similarly circumstanced with themselves. As St. Paul, when his adversaries sought to detract from his character, silenced them by this challenge, "Whereinsoever any is bold, I am bold also: are they Hebrews? so am I; are they Israelites? so am I; are they the seed of Abraham? so am I:" so ought Christians in every department of life to be able to challenge competition with other men, and boldly to say, 'Are they modest, prudent, kind, faithful, diligent? so am I.' This they should be able to do in reference to all heathen virtues, and worldly attainments. But in relation to every thing of a spiritual nature, the Christian should so far excel, that no worldly person should be able to come near him. Our blessed Lord intimates this in the question which he puts to us; "What do ye more than others?" We ought to do more than any other people in the world either do or can do; and, like the Apostle in our text, we should be able to enumerate many things, in which our adversaries, even the best of them, can bear no competition with us.

It is well for the Church of God that St. Paul was so calumniated by his enemies: for, if he had not been so traduced, he never would have recorded the extent of his labours, respecting which, from the brief history of them in the Acts of the Apostles, we should not have formed any adequate conception. True it is, indeed, that he again and again acknowledges, that, if not so compelled to declare the truth, he would have been a fool for boasting in this manner: and we too shall be guilty of the most egregious folly, if we without necessity proclaim our own goodness: but still, I say again, we should be inferior to the world in nothing that pertains to this life,

and superior to them in every thing that pertains to the life to come.

From this account, which the Apostle gives of his own labours, we shall take occasion,

I. To place them more distinctly before you—

Of course, it is only a cursory notice that we can take of them: and indeed it is the accumulated mass, rather than any minute particulars, which will best answer our end in this discourse. Yet, that we may have something of a distinct view of his labours, let us notice,

1. His sufferings—

[St. Paul, at his conversion, had been told by the Saviour “what great things he should suffer for his Master’s sake:” and truly they were great, greater far than those which fell to the share of any other Apostle. He was “in stripes above measure,” being five times scourged by the Jews to the utmost extremity that their law allowed; and thrice by the Romans, though in direct opposition to the Roman law. “In prisons” all the Apostles had been; but not so frequently as he. So “often was he in deaths,” that he felt himself “standing in jeopardy every hour,” and could appeal to God that “he died daily^a.” Thrice did he suffer shipwreck: and on one of those occasions he floated on a piece of the wreck “a day and a night,” every moment in danger of being consigned to a watery grave. On one occasion he was stoned (at Lystra), and actually left for dead: and doubtless he would have died, if God had not, by a miraculous power, raised him up again, and restored him to the use of his limbs^b.

What patience, what resignation, what fortitude, must the Apostle have possessed, when he could persevere in the midst of such continued and severe trials as these! And how strange does it appear, that “in every place such bonds and such afflictions should await” such a man as he; whose only fault was, that he loved his God and Saviour, and loved his fellow-creatures too even beyond his own life! But so it was; and so it will be, as long as ungodly men shall have it in their power to put forth into exercise their enmity against God: and, in proportion as any man resembles Paul in his zeal for Christ, and in his love to men, he will meet with the very same treatment that the Apostle did: and if he be not persecuted

^a 1 Cor. xv. 30, 31.

^b All these were prior to his sufferings recorded in the latter part of the Acts of the Apostles.

unto death, as Paul was, he will be indebted for his protection, not to the abated hostility of men, but to the laws of the land in which he dwells.]

2. His dangers—

[These were incessant, wherever he moved. Sometimes he was in peril “by waters,” that is by rivers, which he was obliged to ford, or more probably by land floods, which he could neither foresee nor escape: sometimes by robbers, who, conceiving him to be carrying money with him from one Church to another, lay in wait to plunder him. Sometimes “by his own countrymen,” who were incensed against him for going to the Gentiles: and at other times “by the heathen,” who were indignant at his endeavours to overthrow idolatry. “In the city,” he was beset by enraged mobs; “in the wilderness,” by ravenous beasts; and, “in the sea,” by frequent tempests, or by pirates, more to be dreaded than death itself.

But who would have thought that persons professing love to Christ should be found adverse to him; and that he should be in as much danger from their envy and jealousy, their subtilty and malignity, as from the more open assaults of professed enemies! Yet amidst his other perils he mentions those in which he was “among false brethren,” who sought by misrepresentations to subvert his influence, and by treachery to destroy his life. Alas! alas! that such impiety should ever be concealed under a cloak of zeal for Christ! Yet the faithful minister shall find that such monsters do exist; and that there are yet in the Church, no less than in the apostolic age, “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” who, if only they can find opportunity to exercise their predominant dispositions, will tear in pieces the Church, and spare neither the shepherd nor the sheep^c.]

3. His privations—

[Amidst all his labours, he was often destitute of the comforts, yea, and of the common necessities of life; so that, in addition to all the weariness and painfulness of his exertions, he was exposed to “hunger and thirst, and cold and nakedness,” not having clothing to protect him from the inclemencies of the weather, nor food to sustain his feeble body. And, as if all these privations were not sufficient, he often added to them by voluntary fastings, and by a sacrifice of needful sleep, that so he might be able to support himself without being burthensome to any, and make himself an example to those who accused him of seeking only his temporal advancement.

^c Acts xx. 29.

How lightly and thoughtlessly do we read this account, as though there were nothing very extraordinary in it! But if we had only to spend one single week in such trials as his, we should soon see what astonishing grace he must have had, that could enable him to bear them for a series of years, and even to "take pleasure in them," if only his Lord and Saviour might be glorified by means of them^d!]

4. His cares—

[These, under such circumstances, were truly overwhelming. The Churches every where, whether planted by him or not, looked to him for guidance and direction in all their difficulties; so that there was a weight upon his mind sufficient to depress any one who did not feel his consolations and supports. The trials of Moses being great, seventy persons were appointed to bear the burthen with him. But Paul had to bear his burthens all alone. He was the referee of all; the counsellor of all; the director of all. Nor did he attend merely to the general concerns of all the Churches: no; he bore in mind the case of every individual that was brought before him; and laboured as much for the benefit of each, as if he had no other object to engage his mind. For this he could appeal to the Corinthians themselves; "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" If any, through prejudice, or ignorance of Christian liberty, or through any other cause, were weak, he sympathized with them, and accommodated himself to their feeble state, and laboured by all possible means to comfort and encourage them. In like manner, if any were stumbled either by the artifices of false teachers, or the violence of persecution, he "burned" with an ardent desire to restore their minds, and to establish their hearts.]

Such was the life of that holy man; and such were the labours in which it was continually occupied. We will now endeavour,

II. To suggest such considerations as obviously arise from them—

But where shall we begin? or, once begun, where shall we end? We must of necessity confine ourselves to a few which are of most general utility. Let us see then in these labours of his,

1. The incalculable value of the soul—

[If we were to judge by the conduct of all around us, we should suppose that the soul were of no value: for the

^d ver. 30. with 2 Cor. xii. 10.

generality of men pay no more attention to their souls than if there were no future state of existence: and of those who profess to care for their souls, how few labour for their welfare with becoming zeal! If they be called upon to bear some reproach, or to sustain some temporal loss, they are ready to draw back, as though the interests of their souls were not worth the sacrifice. They are more terrified at the sneers of a fellow-creature, than at the threatenings of their God; and more desirous of the applause of man, than of the approbation of their Judge. But look at the Apostle Paul: Did he think so lightly of immortal souls? Would he have laboured and suffered so much for them, if they were of no more value than men in general account them? Surely, either he was wrong, or we; if the souls of men deserved no more attention than is usually paid to them, he was a foolish and mad enthusiast: but if we may at all estimate their value by his labours for them, then are the world mad, in paying so much attention to worthless vanities, and in so little regarding what is of more value than the whole world. O ye careless ones, whatever be your rank or age, let me expostulate with you on your more than brutish folly — — —]

2. The vast importance of the Gospel—

[When we urge on men the necessity of believing in Christ, and of living altogether by faith on him, they reply that there is no need of that entire surrender of ourselves to Christ; and that to condemn all who will not comply with such requisitions is uncharitable in the extreme. When we urge them also to use all possible means for the conversion of the heathen, they tell us that we may safely leave them to their respective creeds; and that God is too merciful ever to condemn them. But, if this be true, how can we account for the conduct of the Apostle? Why did he labour so for the conversion of Jews or Gentiles, if either Jews or Gentiles could be saved in any other way than through faith in Christ? *Some* labours and *some* sufferings we may suppose a man to undergo for the sake of proselyting others to his own opinions; but who would endure all that Paul endured, and *that* too so continually, and for so long a series of years, if he had not known that the everlasting welfare of men depended on their acceptance or rejection of his message? Know ye then that the record of God, even that record which says, “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son; he that hath the Son, hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life;” that record, I say, is true: and just so many of you as are living simply by faith on Christ, and receiving every thing out of his fulness, are in a state of salvation: but every

other person without exception is "under condemnation, and the wrath of God abideth on him."

And here let me caution those who are convinced of this truth, to hold it fast and glory in it, though earth and hell should conspire to turn them from it: for if the Apostles laboured so much and endured so much to impart the knowledge of it to others, much more should we be in earnest to secure an interest in it for ourselves — — —]

3. The spirit with which alone men should enter on the ministerial office—

[Many, in undertaking this office, have no view but to their own case, or interest, or honour: and if in these things pre-eminence is to consist, they would have no objection to equal "the very chiefest Apostles." But if their preferment is to resemble that of St. Paul, they care not how many get before them: they have no taste for such things; and if they had ever so small a measure of them, they would account it much more an occasion of complaint than any ground of glorying. But it was in labours and sufferings that St. Paul gloried; first, because they were the best proofs of his ministerial fidelity^e; and, next, because they were the means of magnifying the grace of Christ, whose strength was perfected in his weakness^f. Would to God that more of his spirit were found amongst us! There would not then be such difficulty in finding men to go forth to the work of missions. Now, the leaving of earthly friends, the incurring of some danger from foreign climes, the having but small provision, and looking forward to many difficulties and privations; these are such formidable obstacles, that but few are willing to encounter them. But they who have so little zeal for God, as not to be willing to encounter trials and afflictions in his service, are not fit for the ministry in any place: they may satisfy themselves with a ceremonious round of duties; but they will not so satisfy their God, who requires his stewards to be faithful, and his soldiers to war a good warfare. We must tread in the steps of Paul, if ever we would "save ourselves and them that hear us" — — —]

4. The proper influence of redeeming love—

[Look at the text, all ye who profess to believe in Christ. See what faith will do, wherever it exists in truth. Look and see what ye have ever done for the Lord that can be compared with this: say whether the best amongst you have not cause to blush and mourn for your unprofitableness? If you ask the Apostle Paul, what it was that animated him to such exertions,

^e 2 Cor. vi. 4.

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.

he will tell you, The love of Christ constraineth me. This it was that carried him forward in the midst of so many difficulties, and enabled him to bear up under such accumulated afflictions. This made him ready to be bound or to die, at any time or at any place, content that "Christ should be magnified in his body whether by life or death." Beloved brethren, thus will it work in you: it will fill you with zeal for God, and with love to man. It will make you earnestly desirous to spread the knowledge of the Saviour throughout the world; and will render sacrifices, whether of ease or property, delightful to you. You will account it an unspeakable honour that you are permitted to do or suffer any thing for the advancement of his glory; just as the Apostles, after having been imprisoned and beaten by the Jewish council, departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for their Redeemer's sake. Rise up then, ye servants of the Lord Jesus, and gird yourselves to your Master's work. Let each inquire, What can I do for Christ? How can my time, my property, my talents, my influence be made serviceable to his cause? It is said of the angels, that they do their Maker's will, "hearkening to the voice of his word;" do ye thus look for the first intimations of your Saviour's will. If the most arduous and self-denying office be proposed, be ready instantly to say, "Here am I; send me^g." So will you approve yourselves his disciples indeed, and reap a glorious recompence in the great day of his appearing.]

^g Isai. vi. 8.

MMXLII.

CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY.

2 Cor. xi. 29. *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?*

TRULY, the testimony of a good conscience is a source of unbounded joy. There are, and ever were, those who would traduce the characters of the best of men. The Apostle Paul himself was reproached by many, yea, and by many who professed themselves Christians too, as a "weak" man, and "a fool^a." He was able, however, to give very abundant proof, that, whilst others gloried on false grounds, he had just and good ground for glorying; and that,

^a ver. 16, 21.

“in no respect was he inferior, either to them, or to the very chiefest Apostles^b.” In truth, the very things which rendered him contemptible in the eyes of many, were those which redounded most to his honour. His enemies thought that “hunger and thirst, and cold and nakedness, and persecutions” for Christ’s sake, were occasions for reproach; whereas the Apostle judged that they were grounds rather for approbation from men, and for thanksgivings to God. And, whilst he vindicated himself thus from the charges that were brought against him, he could appeal to his very enemies, and ask, whether his labours had been of a mere general and ostentatious kind; or whether they had not, even to that very hour, been so universal and particular, as to entitle him to gratitude from every member of the Christian Church: “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?”

Now, in this appeal we may see,

I. The infirmities incident to the people of God—

There were at that time, and have been in every age of the Church, some who need all possible attention from their brethren:

1. Those who are weak—

[There are “children” in the family of Christ, no less than “young men” and “fathers.” In truth, there are many who are “weak” *in knowledge*, having but very indistinct views of the Gospel and its attendant privileges——Some also are “weak” *in faith*, even as the Apostles themselves shewed themselves to be on many occasions^c: “they stagger at the promises of God;” and, when greatly tried, are unable firmly to rely upon them——Some, too, are “weak” *in hope*: for though, under the Christian dispensation, we do not see so much of doubts and fears as under the darker dispensation of the law; yet we can have no doubt but that in the apostolic age, as well as now, there were many sincere persons, who felt secret misgivings respecting their own state before God, and wanted that “full assurance of hope” which some were privileged to enjoy. *In conflict*, doubtless, many are “weak.” It is no easy thing to contend even with flesh and blood, and still more with the principalities and powers of

^b ver. 5, 21—28. ^c Matt. vi. 30. Mark iv. 40. Luke viii. 25.

darkness: not a man on earth would be able to stand, if not upheld by an almighty arm: in fact, the only way to be strong in the Christian warfare is, to feel ourselves “weak,” and to be “strong only in the *Lord* and in the power of *his* might” — — —]

2. Those who are offended—

[The consequence of weakness is, a liability to be offended and cast down by untoward circumstances of any kind. It is no uncommon thing for persons to be offended even at the very mysteries of our holy religion. When our Lord spake of our eating his flesh and drinking his blood, some of his Disciples exclaimed, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it^d?” Upon which, our Lord, knowing in himself that his Disciples murmured at it, saith to them, “Doth this offend you? What, and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before^e?” So, at this day, many of the sublimer truths of Christianity are “hard sayings” in the ears of some, whose “hearts, we yet hope, are, on the whole, right with God” — — — Our Lord intimated that it would be so, when he said, “Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me^f.”

And, as some are offended at the *word* of God, so are others at his *providence*: especially when they see what persecutions they have to endure for righteousness’ sake, and how the ungodly triumph over the very Church and cause of God^g — — —

Nor are *the falls or apostasy of professors* an uncommon occasion of offence. We are apt to forget, that “all are not Israel who are of Israel.” There was a Judas even amongst the Apostles themselves: and of the immediate followers of our Lord, so many went back and walked no more with him, that even the stability of the Apostles themselves was endangered^h.]

What then is,

II. The duty of their more established brethren towards them?

Certainly the Apostle’s example is that which we ought to follow, even as he himself followed Christ: of whom it is said, “A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victoryⁱ.”

“With the weak, then, we must be weak”—

^d John vi. 41—43.

^e John vi. 60—62.

^f Matt. xi. 6.

^g Matt. xiii. 21.

^h John vi. 66, 67.

ⁱ Matt. xii. 20.

[We are on no account to despise our weaker brethren, but to treat them with all imaginable condescension and kindness; as the Apostle himself tells us: "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me^k." We should listen to their statements with an attentive ear: we should enter into their feelings, and sympathize with them in their troubles: we should deal tenderly with their mistakes, and should gladly give them the advantage of our superior knowledge and experience. We should come down, as it were, upon their ground: and endeavour to make their way plain before their face. We should "strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; and say to them that are of a fearful heart, Fear not; your God will come and save you^l." This is particularly inculcated in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed^m." This doubtless is the duty of ministers primarily; because they are as fathers, who ought to feel for their children with parental tenderness; and even, as mothers, to "travail in birth with them, till Christ be formed in themⁿ." But it is also the duty of every true Christian: for it is said, "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^o."]

And "those who are offended, we should burn" with ardour to restore—

[Behold the state of the Galatian Church: see them when they were in danger of being turned aside through the influence of Judaizing teachers: what zeal the Apostle manifested to keep them sound in the faith! He hesitated not to reprove even Peter himself, and *that* before the whole Church^p. See the Churches, both of Rome and Corinth, when they were in danger of being drawn to act contrary to the convictions of their own minds, in reference to the eating of meats, and the observing of certain days according to the Jewish law: he enjoined the more enlightened part, who understood the nature and extent of Christian liberty, to abstain from the use of that liberty in the presence of their weaker brethren, lest they should, by the indiscreet use of it, cast a snare and a stumbling-block before any^q: and as for himself, he determined not to eat meat so long as the

^k Rom. xv. 1, 3.

^l Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^m Heb. xii. 12, 13.

ⁿ Gal. iv. 19.

^o Gal. vi. 2.

^p Gal. ii. 14.

^q Rom. xiv. 1—6, 13—15. 1 Cor. viii. 4—12.

world should stand, rather than make a weak brother to offend^r. Whatever be the stumbling-block in our brother's way, we should be inflamed with a desire to remove it, as much as we should to rescue an only child from any peril to which he was exposed. The value of his soul, and the honour of God as interested in it, should be present to our minds; and we should labour with all our might, and with the utmost tenderness of spirit, for the recovery and salvation of his soul — — —]

And now SEE, from hence,

1. How arduous is the office of a minister !

[Had he indeed only to perform a certain routine of duties, his office would be easy enough : but when he has to give an account of every soul committed to his charge, and should be able to say of every individual among them, "Who is weak, and I am not weak ? Who is offended, and I burn not ?" methinks the most zealous minister in the world must perform his office "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling^s." St. Paul himself was constrained to say, "Who is sufficient for these things^t ?" — — —]

2. How lovely is true religion !

[Religion consists, not in the adoption of any creed, but in a conformity to the Divine image. Doubtless there is no salvation but in Christ Jesus ; and, whatever measure of holiness we attain, it can form no ground of glorying before God : but the faith which alone will save us, is "a faith that worketh by love." We may have the knowledge of angels, the liberality of saints, and the zeal of martyrs ; and yet, for want of love, "be only as sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal." See the Lord Jesus, during his ministry on earth : "He bare our sins and carried our sorrows," first in a way of sympathy^u, and afterwards as an atoning sacrifice^x. In the latter sense, this was his exclusive office ; but in the former, it is ours also. Let us then shew forth in our conduct the excellence of his Gospel ; and exercise towards others the tenderness and compassion which we have ever met with at his hands — — —]

^r 1 Cor. viii. 13.

^s 1 Cor. ii. 3.

^t 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^u Matt. viii. 16, 17.

^x Isai. liii. 4.

MMXLIII.

THE SUCCESS OF FERVENT PRAYER.

2 Cor. xii. 7—9. *Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me,*

lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

THERE is scarcely any thing in the Scriptures that more deserves our attention than the remarkable instances of answers to prayer. Throughout the whole Bible, if we see any one betake himself to prayer, we may know beforehand the issue of his conflicts: whatever be his difficulties, if only he go to God, saying, "I have no might in myself, but mine eyes are unto thee," we may be well assured of his success: his petition invariably brings Omnipotence to his support; and he is made more than conqueror over all his adversaries. St. Paul relates a most encouraging instance respecting himself, wherein he found to his unspeakable comfort the efficacy of prayer. To illustrate it, we shall consider,

I. The trial with which he was so oppressed—

Highly favoured as the Apostle was, he was nevertheless bowed down with a heavy affliction—

[None, however honoured and beloved of God, can hope to escape trouble. What the particular trial was, with which the Apostle was assaulted, it is impossible to say. The most reasonable conjecture seems to be, that it was something occasioned by his vision, perhaps some distortion of his features, or impediment in his speech, that rendered both his person and his speech contemptible; and of which the false teachers, those "messengers and ministers of Satan^a," took advantage, to undermine his influence in the Church of God^b. This to the Apostle, whose heart was wholly bent upon glorifying God, and saving the souls of men, would be a heavy affliction, like "a thorn in the flesh," festering and causing the acutest pain. But, whatever it was, Satan took occasion from it to distress the mind of the Apostle with a far keener anguish than his body could have sustained from the severest blows of men^c. Nor need we regret that we are ignorant of the precise

^a 2 Cor. xi. 14, 15.

^b Construe ἄγγελοι Σατᾶν with ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ; and compare 2 Cor. x. 10. with Gal. iv. 13, 14.

^c κολαφίζῃ.

temptation with which St. Paul was harassed; since whatever our trials be, we may consider ourselves as in his situation, and obtain relief in the same way that he did.]

The reason for which that affliction was sent him, it is of great importance to observe—

[The Apostle was not yet perfect: and though he had been caught up into the third heavens, he was yet liable to sin: the seeds of pride were yet in his heart; and they would derive life and vigour even from those very mercies, which, to human appearance, should have had a tendency to destroy them. *To counteract this evil of his heart*, God sent him a heavy trial^d. And, if we were more attentive to the *ends* of God's dispensations towards ourselves, we might always find some good reason for them within our own hearts. Pride is a hateful and accursed evil; and, if suffered to reign within us, will bring us “into the condemnation of the devil:” nor, however severe the remedy may be, should we be averse to endure it, if only it may be instrumental to the extirpating of this deeply-rooted propensity. In this case, though *Satan* may be the agent that *inflicts* the stroke, *God* is the kind friend that “*gives*” it: and though Satan intends us nothing but evil, God overrules it for our good.]

The conduct of the Apostle under his trial will be instructive to us, if we consider,

II. The means by which he obtained deliverance from it—

He carried his trouble to a throne of grace—

[Paul well knew the efficacy of fervent prayer, and how vain it was to contend with Satan in his own strength. He therefore besought the Lord to extract this thorn, and to relieve him from his distress. The Lord not immediately vouchsafing him an answer, he renewed his petitions with yet greater fervour: and when still no answer came, he became more and more urgent, determining, like Jacob of old, that he would not go without a blessing. This was a certain mean of obtaining deliverance. It was the mean which our Lord himself used under the pressure of that wrath that was due to our sins: He prayed “*thrice*” that the cup might pass from him. Nor is such urgent prayer at all expressive of a want of resignation to the will of God: it is our privilege and our duty to “call upon God in the time of trouble;” and troubles are often sent for this very purpose, to bring us nearer to God; and are continued for a time, to discover to us more abundantly the condescension of God in the removal of them.]

^d This is *twice* mentioned in ver. 7.

The person, whom he immediately addressed, was the Lord Jesus—

[Paul had heard Stephen in the hour of martyrdom calling on the Lord Jesus; and had seen what support was administered to him on that trying occasion^e. And whither should he himself fly but to that same adorable Friend, who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” and, “having been in all points tempted like us, is able and willing to succour his tempted people^f.” That his petitions were immediately addressed to Christ, is certain; for we are told in the text, that it was Christ who answered him, and on whose promised aid the Apostle was enabled to rely.]

In due time he received an answer to his petitions—

[At last the suppliant was informed, that the grace of Christ which had already been so abundant in his first conversion, should be “sufficient for him” under every subsequent trial: and that however disheartened the Apostle might be on account of his great and manifold infirmities, he should experience no real evil from them: on the contrary, they should be a source of much good, inasmuch as they should be the means of displaying, and magnifying, the strength of Christ. Thus all cause of complaint was taken away from him, because Satan was sure to be defeated by him, and the work of Christ to be advanced both in his own heart, and by his ministrations in the world. This answer, though not precisely agreeable to the letter of the Apostle’s petition, fully corresponded with the spirit of it. Our blessed Lord himself, when “supplicating with strong crying and tears” for the removal of the cup, did not obtain the precise object of his request; yet we are told that he “was heard,” because he was strengthened, and enabled to drink it^g. Thus the Apostle’s petitions also were crowned with success. The trial was indeed continued: but the end for which God sent it, was accomplished. Had God removed the thorn, it is possible that the Apostle might have been “exalted above measure,” and might thereby have suffered irreparable loss in his soul: but by sanctifying the trouble, God confirmed him in his humility, and rendered him a distinguished instrument of good to his Church.]

That the Apostle considered his petition as completely answered, will appear from,

III. The effect which this answer produced upon him—

From this moment all his sorrows were turned into joy—

^e Acts vii. 58, 59. ^f Heb. ii. 18. and iv. 15. ^g Heb. v. 7.

[St. Paul did not merely submit to the Divine will, and bear with patience a trial which he could not remove; but he even gloried in his tribulations; and made those very infirmities, which just before had been a subject of such pathetic lamentation, an occasion of joy and triumph. It is thus that every Christian is called to manifest his acquiescence in the appointments of heaven: he should count it all joy when he falls into divers temptations, and, being strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with *joyfulness*, he should *give thanks* unto the Father, who, by trials, is fitting him for glory^h.]

The consideration that Christ would be glorified in him, was sufficient to counterbalance all that he had suffered, or might yet suffer for his sake—

[The honour of Christ was dear unto the Apostle, and should be dear unto all who call themselves Christians. The continuance of the trial in the Apostle's flesh, was an occasion of Christ's more abundant kindness towards him. His compassionate Saviour drew nigh unto him, and dwelt as it were upon him, as God, by the symbol of his presence, had formerly rested on the tabernacle in the wildernessⁱ. And as the rebellious Israelites had been constrained to acknowledge the presence of God with Moses, so were Paul's enemies constrained to acknowledge that Christ was with him of a truth. The more weak and contemptible he was in their eyes, the more they must be compelled to glorify Christ, by whom he was strengthened in his spirit, and made successful in his ministrations. And if more glory might be brought to Christ by means of these infirmities, he was not only willing to endure them, but ready to glory in them even unto death^k.]

EXHORTATION—

Let us inquire into the cause of our troubles—

[The rod has a voice which we ought to hear^l: and, if we would attend to it, it would discover to us many hidden but grievous abominations, which lurk unseen in our hearts; and we should almost invariably find, not only that the chastisement was needed by us, but that it was that very trial which was most of all calculated to promote our spiritual and eternal good — —]

Let us carry them all to a throne of grace—

[It is to little purpose to complain of them to our fellow-creatures: but “God never says to any, Seek ye my face in

^h Jam. i. 2. Col. i. 11, 12.

^k Phil. i. 20.

ⁱ ἐπισκευνώση.

^l Mic. vi. 9.

vain." Who could have conceived that Paul should receive such a speedy and effectual answer to *his* prayer? But if we were alike urgent in our supplications, we should be crowned with the like success — — —]

Let us exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—

[He says to us, "Believe in God; believe also in ME^m." He is God, equal with the Father; and "in him all fulness dwells." His promise is addressed to all his suffering and tempted people; and the truth of it shall be experienced by them all. Only let us believe in him; and no adversary shall be too strong, no calamity too heavy, no duty too difficult; for "all things are possible to him that believeth."]

^m John xiv. 1.

MMXLIV.

A SENSE OF WEAKNESS CONDUCTIVE TO STRENGTH.

2 Cor. xii. 10. *When I am weak, then am I strong.*

THERE are many things in Scripture which appear inconsistent and contrary to truth. Christ is represented as God, and yet a man; as the Lord of David, and yet his son; as a lion, and yet a lamb. And, as his person is thus variously described, so is his work: he is said to heal us by his own stripes, and to give us life by his death. But, however strange such expressions may seem, they contain many important truths. In the same manner the Apostle's words, which we have now read, may be thought to imply a contradiction: but they accord with the experience of all God's people, and justly deserve the most attentive consideration.

In discoursing on this *paradoxical* assertion, we shall *illustrate*, *confirm*, and *improve* it.

I. Illustrate it—

A part of David's history will help us to elucidate the words before us—

[When the champion of the Philistines defied, and terrified, the whole army of Israel, David, "a stripling," without armour, defensive or offensive (except a sling and a stone), went forth against him; and, though unused to war himself,

entered into combat with that experienced and mighty warrior. But the weaker he was in himself, the more confident was he in his God; and instead of being intimidated by the threatening aspect and boasting menaces of his adversary, he was as assured of victory, as if he had seen his enemy already under his feet^a.]

But the context will give the best clew to the Apostle's meaning—

[St. Paul laboured under a heavy trial, which he calls a thorn in his flesh^b. Apprehensive that this would counteract his usefulness in the world, he cried most earnestly to the Lord Jesus Christ to remove it from him. But the Lord, not judging it expedient to grant him his request, promised him (what was incomparably better) more abundant communications of grace, whereby he should obtain in a more advantageous manner the desires of his soul. Observe the effect—Paul remained as weak as ever; but, being persuaded that Christ's power should be the more magnified through his weakness, he was satisfied; yea, rather, he made *that* a matter of joy and triumph, which had just before been a source of the greatest trouble. He was well assured that, however unable he was in himself either to bear his trials, or to fulfil his duties, he could not but succeed, when his Almighty Friend was pledged to succour and support him.]

The Apostle's assertion being equally applicable to all believers, we shall,

II. Confirm it—

A sense of weakness necessarily tends to make us strong, inasmuch as it makes us,

1. Watchful against temptations—

[If we conceive ourselves to be strong, we shall be fearless of temptation; and by exposing ourselves to it, shall be in greater danger of falling: whereas, if we feel our utter weakness, we shall not only pray, "Lead us not into temptation," but shall carefully shun the places, the books, the company, that may ensnare us. Like Joseph, we shall not parley with the tempter, but flee in haste: or, if we cannot flee, we shall oppose our enemy at first; and thus vanquish that, which, if it had time to gather strength, would soon vanquish us.]

2. Importunate in prayer—

[It is the sick alone who calls for a physician; they who are strong in their own conceit, will never pray in earnest;

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 45—47.

^b ver. 7, 8.

but he who feels his need of divine assistance will seek it at a throne of grace. Now if we do not pray for God's aid, we cannot receive it; and therefore in the hour of trial shall surely fail. But, if we pray with importunity and faith, we shall obtain the things we ask for; and consequently shall be upheld, while others fall. It was by this means that Paul obtained strength; "he prayed to the Lord *thrice*:" the answer vouchsafed to his petition dissipated all his fears, and strengthened him with might in his inner man: and similar means will always be attended with similar success.]

3. Dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ—

[In proportion as we fancy ourselves strong, we must of necessity confide in our own strength; the consequence of which may be sufficiently seen in the repeated falls of Peter. *Being strong* in his own apprehension, *he proved himself lamentably weak*. But, if we are conscious that we are wholly without strength, and can do nothing of ourselves, we shall be more simple and uniform in our dependence on Christ. Now Christ will never suffer those who trust in him to be confounded. He would consider it as an impeachment of his own veracity, if he did not give them "grace sufficient for them;" consequently we never are so truly strong, as when we are deeply convinced of our own utter impotence.]

This truth enters deeply into the experience of all the Lord's people: we shall therefore endeavour to,

III. Improve it—

Among the various lessons which it teaches us, let us especially learn two:

1. Not to be too much elated on account of any manifestations of the Divine favour—

[Paul was caught up into the third heavens; but soon afterwards we behold him crying, with much anguish of mind, under a severe affliction. Thus it may soon be with us. Indeed the seasons most distinguished by God's favour to us, are often most distinguished also by Satan's malice. It was immediately after they had received peculiar tokens of God's love, that he assaulted Paul^c, and Peter^d, and Christ himself^e. Let us then, when most highly favoured, "rejoice with trembling^f," and not while harnessed, boast as if we had put off our armour^g.]

2. Not to be too much dejected on account of our manifold infirmities—

^c ver. 4. ^d Matt. xvi. 17, 23.

^e Matt. iii. 17. and iv. 1.

^f Ps. ii. 11.

^g 1 Kings xx. 11.

[Jacob was lamed by God himself, that he might know he had not prevailed by his own strength^h. And Paul had a thorn in the flesh given him, "lest he should be exalted above measure." Now our infirmities are very painful: but they are necessary, in order to keep alive in our minds a remembrance of our own weakness and vileness: and, if we do but carry them to God in fervent prayer, he will glorify himself by means of them, and "perfect his strength in our weakness." "Let the weak then say, I am strongⁱ;" let them "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^k;" and, doubtless, they shall receive that effectual succour which believers, in all ages, have experienced^l, and shall invariably find their "strength according to their day" of trial^m.]

^h Gen. xxxii. 25.ⁱ Joel iii. 10.^k Eph. vi. 10.^l Heb. xi. 34.^m Deut. xxxiii. 25.

MMXLV.

THE DUTY OF MINISTERS.

2 Cor. xii. 14. *I seek not yours, but you.*

DISINTERESTEDNESS, in whatever it appears, is universally admired — — — But most of all does its excellency appear, when it is manifested in the service of the sanctuary. The ministers, whom the prophet represents as "greedy dogs that could never have enough^a," and who would "not so much as shut the doors of the temple, or kindle a fire on the altar for nought^b," must be considered by every one as the most contemptible of men: whereas the appeal which the Apostle makes to the Church at Corinth, cannot fail of exalting his character in the eyes of all. We may learn from this declaration,

I. The paramount duty of ministers—

Ministers are the pastors of their flock; and ought to watch over them as parents over their children. Now a parent does not exercise kindness to his children from a selfish consideration of the profit which he may one day make of them, but from a real delight in their welfare; and he regards their happiness as his reward. Thus a minister must seek,

^a Isai. lvi. 11.^b Mal. i. 10.

1. Not his own advantage—

[To obtain honour and emolument is ardently desired by carnal and worldly men: but a minister of God must be superior to such low pursuits. He must *not* court the *favour of men*. He ought indeed to avoid needless offence both in his preaching and conduct: he should “choose out acceptable words^c,” and endeavour to “please all men for their good to edification^d :” but he must not conceal or adulterate any single expression of the word of God^e, or attempt to set forth the truths of God in a fascinating manner, for the purpose of gaining applause, or of shunning persecution^f: he must faithfully “declare the whole counsel of God,” and “commend himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God :” and, if he do not preach in this manner, “he cannot be a servant of Jesus Christ^g.”

Neither must he seek to enrich himself with *their property*: “Those who serve at the altar have a right to live of the altar :” “The ox was not to be muzzled, while he was treading out the corn.” “The labourer is worthy of his hire.” But the obtaining of a maintenance should not in the least degree operate with a minister as an inducement to undertake or execute his high office. If he were actuated by such a principle as this, he would degrade himself to a mere hireling^h. Nor can he suffer so mean a principle to influence him at all in his work, without greatly diminishing the value of his services, and their acceptableness in the sight of Godⁱ. The injunction given to Christians in general should be regarded with peculiar scrupulosity by him, “Let no man seek his own, but every man another’s wealth^k.”]

2. The advantage only of his flock—

[Their sincere *conversion* to God, their *progressive edification* in faith and love, and their *final* everlasting *salvation*, are to be the unvaried aim of all his labours. “He must lift up his voice like a trumpet, and shew the house of Israel their sins.” He must not be satisfied with effecting a change in their sentiments and external conduct, but must continue “travailing in birth with them, till Christ be manifestly formed in their hearts.” When that end is attained, his care of them, instead of being relaxed, must be increased. They still need his unremitting exertions, to administer to their numerous wants, and to give them from time to time that direction and encouragement which their necessities require^l.

^c Eccl. xii. 10.^d Rom. xv. 2.^e 2 Cor. ii. 17.^f 1 Cor. i. 17.^g Gal. i. 10.^h 1 Sam. ii. 36.ⁱ 1 Pet. v. 2.^k 1 Cor. x. 24. Phil. ii. 4, 21.^l Ezek. xxxiv. 1.

As long as they continue in this world, he is God's minister to them for good, and the medium through whom he will communicate to them the blessings of grace and peace. He is to live for them, to the end that he may be "an helper of their joy," and "perfect that which is lacking in their faith." This is to be his one employment; and he is to consider the salvation of their souls his richest recompence^m.]

This subject naturally involves in it,

II. The corresponding duty of the people—

The relation of pastor and flock, like every other relation in life, has its peculiar and appropriate obligations. Those which arise out of the text, as pertaining to the people, are,

1. To seek above all things the salvation of their own souls—

[We are far from saying that people are not to attend to their temporal concerns: on the contrary, we affirm, that a neglect of their worldly business is exceeding criminal in the sight of God; that their duties in civil and social life are as much to be attended to as any other duties whatever; and that their families and dependents would have just cause of complaint, if their temporal interests were disregarded. But still, the first of all duties is, the care of our own souls. Nothing can equal the value of the soul: "if we would gain the whole world, and lose our own soul, what should we be profited?" If a minister must not suffer any earthly interests to stand in competition with the souls of his people, how much less should the people suffer them to stand in competition with *their own* souls! In this view their duty is very strongly marked; and the reasonableness of attending to it is incontrovertibly established.]

2. To improve the ministry with all diligence—

[It has been shewn that ministers should invariably keep in view the salvation of their hearers. What then should the hearers do when about to attend upon the means of grace? Should they not bear in mind their own responsibility for their due improvement of the ordinances? Should they not pray earnestly to God to prepare their hearts for the reception of divine truth, and to accompany it with the effectual working of his almighty power? Should they not entreat him to give unto their minister "a mouth and wisdom which none shall be able to gainsay or resist;" and to direct him "how to speak a word in season to their weary souls?" In short,

^m 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

should they not be as solicitous to receive, as their minister can be to communicate, good; and should not every other consideration be regarded as a matter of comparative indifference? Happy would it be for the Church of God, and happy for the world at large, if such dispositions obtained amongst the hearers, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed!]

APPLICATION—

[We ask, What is the improvement which you have made of our ministry? We presume not to compare ourselves with the holy Apostle: we know full well how remote we are from him in every attainment: yet we hope that, in some small measure, we may adopt his language in the text, and say, “We seek not yours, but you.” (Would to God that we could affirm it as fully, and as confidently, as Paul himself!) Let each of you then put the question to himself, and ask, Whether the pursuit of your own salvation be the one concern which swallows up, as it were, all others? At least, are all other things comparatively worthless in your eyes? And are you, “as new-born babes, desiring the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby?” Remember that, if *we* must give an account of your souls to God, much more must *you* give an account of *your own* souls; and the more our exertions for you are increased, the more will your condemnation be aggravated, if they prove ineffectual for your salvation.]

MMXLVI.

THE POWER OF THE RISEN SAVIOUR.

2 Cor. xiii. 4. *Though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.*

AMONGST the evidences of our holy religion, there are many which are of a recondite nature; and which, as superadded to those which are more obvious, are of great importance. The passage before us affords a strong proof that the Apostle Paul was no impostor. Suppose that he knew himself to have been acting the part of a deceiver, he would be extremely careful not to offend and irritate those who might detect his treachery. But behold, when he had occasion to reprove the Corinthians for their unchristian practices, he declared, that, if they

persisted in them, he would exert his apostolical authority, and inflict upon them, in the Saviour's name, some heavy judgment. Now, if he had not known that such an authority was delegated to him, and that the Lord Jesus Christ himself would uphold him in the exercise of it, he would not have ventured to utter such a threat as this; because it would, of necessity, lead to an exposure of his own weakness, and to the overthrow of that religion which he was endeavouring to establish.

The power of Christ, which he here asserts, must be considered by us in a twofold view:

I. As possessed by himself—

In his crucifixion, he appeared weak—

[He did indeed exhibit somewhat of his almighty power, in beating to the ground with a mere word all the soldiers who came to apprehend him. And at the bar of Pilate he declared, that his judge could have no power at all against him, except it were given him from above. He could, if he had seen fit, have had twelve legions of angels sent to rescue him. But he had previously determined to submit to all the indignities which they should offer him. In the prophetic writings concerning him it had been foretold, that he should give his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; yea, that he should go as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before its shearers, not so much as open his mouth in murmurings or complaints. Accordingly, he submitted to every thing with such meek resignation, that he appeared to his enemies to be incapable of delivering himself from their hands. With this, the people around him taunted him, saying, "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God^a." Thus, in apparent weakness, he died.]

But he still liveth by the power of God—

[In vain were all the precautions taken by his enemies: the stone, the seal, the guard, were not able to detain him a

^a Matt. xxvii. 40—43.

prisoner in the grave. At the time he had foretold, he burst the bonds of death, by which it was impossible he should be holden, and rose triumphant; and in due season ascended to the right hand of his Father, far above all principalities and powers, whether in heaven or in hell. There He possesses all power in heaven and in earth: there are all things committed to his hands: there is He, in a more especial manner, made Head over all things to his Church, to every individual of which he imparts whatsoever is needful for him — — — And there will he reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet — — —]

In connexion with this must we contemplate his power,

II. As delegated to his ministers—

The Apostles were invested with miraculous powers; which, when moved to it by him, they exercised, sometimes in a way of mercy, and sometimes also in a way of judgment. St. Paul had, by the authority committed to him, delivered to Satan, Hymeneus and Philetus, and the incestuous Corinthian: and, with a similar judgment, he threatened to visit other refractory persons at Corinth, if they should persist in their contemptuous and profane conduct. Those powers have long since ceased in the Church: but others are transmitted to God's faithful ministers in all ages.

Ministers are weak, like their divine Master—

[Paul himself was, in all his sufferings, conformed to his blessed Lord; and, in enduring them, appeared weak as He. And ministers at this day are exposed to the same trials, which they are to bear in the same submissive manner. And so weak do they appear, that persons of every description, the poor as well as the rich, the young as well as the old, will venture to insult and injure them — — —]

But, through Him, they also are strong—

[Every word which they speak in their Master's name, *supposing it to be really in accordance with the written word*, shall be ratified in heaven: "what they bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and what they loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven." In them the Lord Jesus Christ will evince his own almighty power. He will manifest it *in them personally*; enabling them to sustain all their trials with fortitude, and to perform all their duties with fidelity^b — — — And he will manifest it *by them ministerially*, accompanying their word with power from on high, and enabling them to raise to

^b 2 Cor. iv. 10, 11.

newness of life those who were “dead in trespasses and sins.” There was not a miracle wrought by our Lord in the days of his flesh, which, *in a spiritual sense*, he does not yet work by all his faithful ministers. Their cause, too, will he maintain against all their adversaries; and he will, ere long, make it visible to all, that those who have persecuted *them*, have persecuted *Him*; and that they who have “touched *them*, have touched the apple of *his* eye.”]

Let me, from this subject, EXHORT you,

1. To look to the Lord Jesus Christ for all you want—

[Look not unto *man*, as though he were able to supply your wants. “Paul himself may plant, and Apollos water; but it is God alone that can give the increase.” The Lord Jesus Christ is “exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour.” He is the Head of all vital influence. He has a fulness of all things committed to him for you: and “out of his fulness you may receive, at all times, grace,” answerable to the grace that there is in him — — —]

2. Never to be discouraged on account of your weakness—

[You are weak; but “your Redeemer is strong:” yes, “there is help laid for you upon One that is mighty.” Conceive of yourselves as reduced even to as helpless a state as Christ himself was, when dead upon the cross, and buried in the grave. Shall you despair? No: your weakness shall only be an occasion for the more glorious manifestation of God’s power in the season of your greatest need. Only be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; and in due season the whole power of the Godhead, which was displayed in Christ in raising him from the dead, shall be displayed in you; and you, like him, shall, in God’s appointed time, be exalted to his throne, and be a partaker of his kingdom for ever and ever.]

c Eph. i. 19.

MMXLVII.

SELF-EXAMINATION RECOMMENDED.

2 Cor. xiii. 5. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?*

IT is generally, perhaps always, found, that they who are most forward to censure others, have most need of personal reformation. So it certainly was with those who laboured to injure the character, and

undermine the influence, of the Apostle Paul. Whilst they accused him as a weak, ignorant impostor, pretending to a heavenly commission which he had never received, they were in reality no other than ministers of Satan, scattering the flocks which they pretended to feed. Hence they constrained the Apostle to declare, that his forbearance towards them had a limit, and that their defiance of him, if further persisted in, would terminate ere long in their own confusion. To prevent so painful an issue, he entreated them to examine themselves as to their spirit and conduct; and to beware lest, after all their boastings, they should be disapproved of their God at last.

But it is not to persons only who are so circumstanced that the exhortation ought to be addressed: it is of universal importance; and highly proper for our consideration at all times.

Let us then consider,

I. The duty to which we are here called—

Self-examination is a duty incumbent upon all.

— — — But, instead of entering generally into the subject, we will confine our attention to two things:

1. The point more especially suggested for our inquiry—

[The great question for every man to have settled in his mind and conscience is, whether he be in the faith, or whether he be yet in unbelief? To ascertain this point, we should ask ourselves, whether we have ever come to Christ as sinners, pleading for mercy solely through the blood of his cross, and “desiring to be found in him,” accepted altogether through his meritorious death and passion? Yet, not content with this, we should prosecute the inquiry further, and ask, whether we be daily living by faith in the Lord Jesus, and receiving every thing out of his fulness? Nor must we rest, even though we should receive a favourable testimony from our consciences in this matter: we must examine yet farther the fruits of our faith, and see whether it produce such a life as proves it to be “the faith of God’s elect?” If our self-examination proceed not thus far, it will leave us as much under the power of self-deceit, as if we took no pains at all to investigate our state. These are the points which are of vital interest to every true Christian; and by them must the truth of our profession, and the safety of our state, be determined.]

2. The manner of conducting that inquiry—

[The words, “prove your own selves,” are not a mere repetition: they are intended to mark more particularly the care and accuracy with which the investigation should be made. The Apostle refers to the trying of metals, in order to find what measure of alloy or dross may be in them. Not to mention the care exercised by the refiner, we all know what care is taken in reference to gold, even when there are but a few pieces of golden coin to be received. We subject it to the closest inspection; we mark its colour, its sound, and, if there be any doubt, its size and weight, that we may not be deceived by counterfeits under the appearance of standard coin. Shall we then take so much pains about things of little value, and neglect the soul which is of more value than ten thousand worlds? Should not rather our care increase in proportion to the loss which we may possibly sustain? This then is the manner in which we should inquire into the concerns of our souls, and more especially into that on which beyond all others the welfare of our souls depends.]

To impress the more deeply on our minds this duty, the Apostle suggests,

II. The importance of discharging it with all diligence—

We ought to know our own selves—

[Each other we cannot know; seeing that both the best and the worst of every man is hid from human observation, and can be appreciated only by Him who searcheth the heart. But with “*ourselves*” we may be, and ought to be, acquainted. God has given to us an understanding, that we may know the quality of our actions; a memory, that we may trace them to their proper source; and a conscience, that we may pass sentence on ourselves according to our true character. Ignorance of ourselves is the worst of all ignorance: we may be ignorant of every thing else, and yet come to God in Christ Jesus with acceptance: but if we are ignorant of ourselves, we must of necessity be unhumiliated and impenitent, and consequently objects of God’s utter abhorrence. The very manner in which the Apostle asks the question, “Know ye not your own selves?” shews, that self-ignorance is a just ground for self-reproach.]

Whatever we may think of ourselves, “if Christ be not in us, we are reprobates”—

[The term “reprobates” conveys a much harsher idea than is contained in the original. The Apostle, having bidden us *prove* our own selves as metals are tried and proved, tells us that, if in the issue we be found without Christ, we shall be regarded by our God as base metal, or as dross: we shall

be disapproved, and rejected^a. And this is the very truth of God. If "Christ dwell in our hearts by faith," it is well: but if he be not in us, by his Spirit, by his influence, by his grace, we are mere counterfeits, and no better; we may pass current here, if I may so say, but we shall be detected and discarded in the great day of account — — — And is this a truth unknown to us? Has not God expressly said, that "Christ is our life," and that, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his?" How comes it then that this sentiment is ever doubted for one moment? Beloved brethren, neither the truth itself, nor its bearing on your own state before God, ought to be unknown to any of you. You ought to have the experience of it in your souls, and the evidence of it in your lives: nor should you ever cease to examine and prove yourselves till you are assured, on truly scriptural grounds, that "Christ has indeed been formed in you^b," and that you are so "joined to him as to be one spirit with him^c."]

Permit me, in CONCLUSION, to urge upon you this duty, from two important considerations: Consider,

1. The danger of self-deception—

[The great mass of mankind deceive their own souls: the generality perform not this duty at all: and, of those who do, few carry it to a due extent. It is not sufficient to inquire into our external conduct: we must inquire into the life of faith upon the Son of God, and see how far *that* is realized in us. *That*, if we be tolerably right in external matters, we are apt to take for granted: but we must make *that*, above all, the subject of our diligent inquiry; because, if Christ be not in us, there is nothing in us that can ever be approved of by our God — — — O what a fearful thing will it be to be found dross at the last! — — — Remember, "Not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth^d."]

2. The comfort of a self-approving conscience—

St. Paul felt this in a very high degree^e; and we also may enjoy it, if it be not our own fault. Some deride the idea of marks and evidences, and maintain that the Christian has no need of paying any attention to them. But, how we are to "examine and prove ourselves" without them, is beyond their power to inform us, and of mine to conceive. We must bring ourselves to the test of God's word: and if, from a diligent comparison of ourselves with the commands of God and the examples of his holy Apostles, we find that our experience is such as is required of us in the Gospel, then may we rejoice both in the retrospect of our past lives, and in the

^a Jer. vi. 30.

^b Gal. iv. 19.

^c 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^d 2 Cor. x. 18.

^e 2 Cor. i. 12.

prospect of the future judgment: "if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things: but if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God^f."]]

^f 1 John iii. 20, 21.

MMXLVIII.

THE APOSTOLICAL BENEDICTION.

2 Cor. xiii. 14. *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

THE priests, under the law, were appointed to bless the people^a. The ministers of the Gospel also may consider this as a part of their office. All St. Paul's epistles begin or end with an authoritative benediction: that before us is more full and comprehensive than any other.

We shall endeavour to point out,

I. Its meaning—

Various are the senses in which these words have been understood. We shall content ourselves with stating what we apprehend to be the best.

The "grace of Christ" is that grace which he communicates^b—

[There is a fulness of grace treasured up in Christ^c: out of that all his people are to receive^d; and all who depend upon it, shall find it sufficient for them^e.]

The "love of God" is a sense of reconciliation and acceptance with him^f—

[For this we are prepared by the grace of Christ; and by it we are brought to regard God as our Father and our Friend.]

The "communion of the Holy Ghost" imports the abiding influence of the Spirit—

[There are sublime communications of the Spirit, which the people of God receive. These are represented as a Spirit of adoption^g, a witness^h, a sealⁱ, an earnest of their eternal

^a Numb. vi. 22—27.

^b If we understand it as relating to his *special favour*, it will anticipate the meaning of the next clause.

^c Col. i. 19. ^d John i. 16. ^e 2 Cor. xii. 9. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

^f It cannot import *our love to him*, because it is something which we are to receive from him.

^g Rom. viii. 15.

^h Rom. viii. 16.

ⁱ Eph. i. 13.

inheritance^k. By these they are enabled confidently to depend on God, and to delight themselves habitually in him; and by these they maintain continual fellowship with the Father and the Son^l.]

That all of these might be enjoyed by the Christians at Corinth, was the earnest wish and prayer of the Apostle—

[They were not gifts peculiar to a few of the most exalted saints: they were the common privilege of “all” who truly believed; and are to be experienced now, as well as in former ages. We should therefore in the word, “Amen,” express our own fervent desire to partake of them.]

Having ascertained the meaning of this benediction, let us notice,

II. Its importance—

This will be manifest to all, if only we inquire,

1. What should we be without “the grace of Christ?”

[Beyond a doubt we should be “dead in trespasses and sins.” There is no other *source of grace*, but the Lord Jesus Christ^m: there is no *substitute for grace* that can have equal efficacyⁿ: there is no *life without grace* to any soul of man^o.]

2. What should we be without “the love of God?”

[There is no medium between a state of friendship with God, or of enmity against him. If we be not objects of his love and favour, we must be of his just and heavy displeasure.]

3. What should we be without the “communion of the Holy Ghost?”

[There is no access to God but by the Holy Ghost^p. If we be not brought to God by the Spirit, we must be afar off from him^q; and if we are without God, we are absolutely without hope^r. Such a state is a prelude to that which will exist for ever^s.]

Can any thing more strongly mark the importance of this benediction than such considerations? But let us proceed to notice,

III. Its excellence—

In the text is comprehended all that is great and glorious—

1. It unfolds to us the deepest mysteries—

^k Eph. i. 14.

^l 1 John i. 3.

^m John vi. 68.

ⁿ Not reason, or education, or human strength. ^o Eph. ii. 5.

^p Eph. ii. 18.

^q Eph. ii. 13, 17.

^r Eph. ii. 12.

^s Luke xvi. 23, 26.

[All the persons in the ever-blessed Trinity sustain distinct offices in the work of redemption. The Christian has, as it were, distinct communion with each of these divine persons. From each he receives that which his state requires; and from their combined influence arises his full salvation. How unsearchable are the heights and depths of this stupendous mystery !]

2. It opens to us the most glorious privileges and blessings—

[What on earth can be compared with these blessings? Contemplate “the grace of Christ,” by which the dead are quickened, the vile are sanctified, the weak are made victorious. As for “the love of God,” say, ye glorified saints, what that means; or, ye damned spirits, who know it only by your hopeless bereavement. And who can declare what “the communion of the Holy Ghost” is, when the taste of it creates a very heaven upon earth? Would to God, that the words so often, and so carelessly repeated by us, were more deeply considered, and more richly experienced!]

LEARN then from hence,

1. The proper object of a Christian’s ambition—

[Earthly honours and carnal pleasures are unworthy of his pursuit; he should be satisfied with nothing but the full attainment of these blessings.]

2. The benefit of fervent prayer—

[We may ask the smallest things of man, and be disappointed of our hope: we may ask all that the blessed Trinity can give us, without fear of disappointment^t.]

3. The misery of those who are careless about religion—

[These blessings will not be bestowed unless we seek them; and, if we possess them not, we are poor indeed: if we die before we have attained them, it were better for us that we had never been born.]

^t Ps. lxxxi. 10.



